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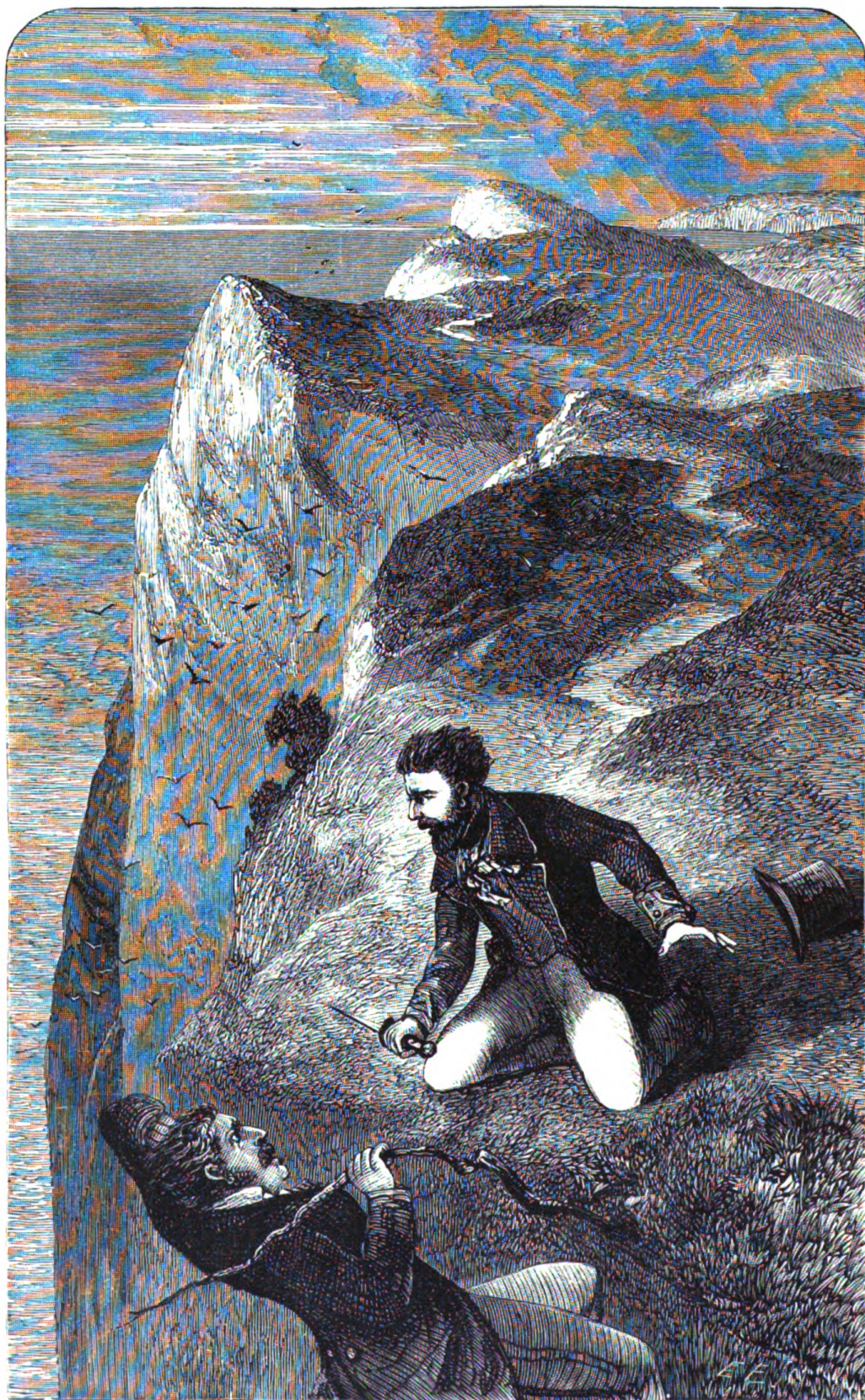
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DEVEREUX'S DREAM.



# A STABLE FOR NIGHTMARES.

## DEVEREUX'S DREAM.

I GIVE you this story only at secondhand; but you have it in substance—and he wasted few words over it—as Paul Devereux told it me.

It was not the only queer story he could have told about himself if he had chosen, by a good many, I should say. Paul's life had been an eminently unconventional one: the man's face certified to that—hard bronzed, war-worn, seamed and scarred with strange battle-marks—the face of a man who had dared and done most things.

It was not his custom to speak much of what he had done, however. Probably only because he and I were little likely to meet again that he told me this I am free to tell you now.

We had come across one another for the first time for years that afternoon on the Italian Boulevard. Paul had landed a couple of weeks previously at Marseilles from a long yacht-cruise in southern waters, the monotony of which we heard had been agreeably diversified by a little pirate-hunting and slaver-chasing—the evil tongues called it piracy and slave-running; and certainly Devereux was quite equal to either *métier*; and he was about starting on a promising little filibustering expedition across the Atlantic, where the chances were

he would be shot, and the certainty was that he would be starved. So perhaps he felt inclined to be a trifle more communicative than usual, as we sat late that night over a blazing pyre of logs and in a cloud of Cavendish. At all events he was, and after this fashion.

I forget now exactly how the subject was led up to. Expression of some philosophic incredulity on my part regarding certain matters, followed by a ten minutes' silence on his side pregnant with unwonted words to come—that was it, perhaps. At last he said, more to himself, it seemed, than to me:

“Such stuff as dreams are made of.” Well, who knows? You're a Sadducee, Bertie; you call this sort of thing, politely, indigestion. Perhaps you're right. But yet I had a queer dream once.

‘Not unlikely,’ I assented.

‘You're wrong; I never dream, as a rule. But, as I say, I had a queer dream once; and queer because it came literally true three years afterwards.’

‘Queer indeed, Paul.’

‘Happens to be true. What's queerer still, my dream was the means of my finding a man I owed a long score, and a heavy one, and of my paying him in full.’

‘Bad for the payee!’ I thought.

Paul's face had grown terribly

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eloquent as he spoke those last words. On a sudden the expression of it changed — another memory was stirring in him. Wonderfully tender the fierce eyes grew; wonderfully tender the faint, sad smile, that was like sunshine on storm-scathed granite. That smile transfigured the man before me.

'Ah, poor child—poor Lucille!' I heard him mutter.

That was it, was it? So I let him be. Presently he lifted his head. If he had let himself get the least thing out of hand for a moment, he had got back his self-mastery the next.

'I'll tell you that queer story, Bertie, if you like,' he said.

The proposition was flatteringly unusual, but the voice was quite his own.

'Somehow I'd sooner talk than think about—*her*,' he went on after a pause.

I nodded. He might talk about this, you see, but *I* couldn't. He began with a question—an odd one:

'Did you ever hear I'd been married?'

Paul Devereux and a wife had always seemed and been to me a most unheard-of conjunction. So I laconically said,

'No.'

'Well, I was once, years ago. She was my wife—that child—for a week. And then—'

I easily filled up the pause; but, as it happened, I filled it up wrongly; for he added:

'And then she was murdered.'

I was not unused to our Paul's stony style of talk; but this last sentence was sufficiently startling.

'Eh?'

'Murdered—in her sleep. They never found the man who did it either, though I had Durbec and all the Rue de Jérusalem at work. But I forgave them that, for I

found the man myself, and killed him.'

He was filling his pipe again as he told me this, and he perhaps rammed the Cavendish in a little tighter, but that was all. The thing was a matter of course; I knew my Paul well enough to know that. Of course he killed him.

'Mind you,' he continued, kindling the black *brûle-gueule* the while—'mind you, I'd never seen this man before, never known of his existence, except in a way that—however, it was this way.'

He let his grizzled head drop back on the cushions of his chair, and his eyes seemed to see the queer story he was telling enacted once more before him in the red hollows of the fire.

'As I said, it was years ago. I was waiting here in Paris for some fellows who were to join me in a campaign we'd arranged against the African big game. I never was more fit for anything of that sort than I was then. I only tell you this to show you that the thing can't be accounted for by my nerves having been out of order at all.

'Well: I was dining alone that day, at the Café Anglais. It was late when I sat down to my dinner in the little salon as usual. Only two other men were still lingering over theirs. All the time they stayed they bored me so persistently with some confounded story of a murder they were discussing, that I was once or twice more than half-inclined to tell them so. At last, though, they went away.

'But their talk kept buzzing abominably in my head. When the waiter brought me the evening paper, the first thing that caught my eye was a circumstantial account of the *probable* way the fellow did his murder. I say probable, for they never caught him; and, as you will see directly, they



could only suppose how it occurred.

'It seemed that a well-known Paris banker, who was ascertained beyond doubt to have left one station alive and well, and with a couple of hundred thousand francs in a leathern *sac* under his seat, arrived at the next station the train stopped at with his throat cut and *minus* all his money, except a few bank-notes to no great amount, which the assassin had been wise enough to leave behind him. The train was a night express on one of the southern lines; the banker travelled quite alone, in a first-class carriage; and the murder must have taken place between midnight and one A.M. next morning. The newspapers supposed—rightly enough, I think—that the murderer must have entered the carriage *from without*, stabbed his victim in his sleep—there were no signs of any struggle—opened the *sac*, taken what he wanted, and retreated, loot and all, by the way he came. I fully indorsed my particular writer's opinion that the murderer was an uncommonly cool and clever individual, especially as I fancy he got clear off and was never afterwards laid hands on.

'When I had done that I thought I had done with the affair altogether. Not at all. I was regularly ridden with this confounded murder. You see the banker was rather a swell; everybody knew him: and that, of course, made it so shocking. So everybody kept talking about him: they were talking about him at the Opera, and over the *baccarat* and *bouillotte* at La Topaze's later. To escape him I went to bed and smoked myself to sleep. And then a queer thing came to pass: I had a dream—I who never dream; and this is what I dreamed:

'I saw a wide, rich country that

I knew. A starless night hung over it like a pall. I saw a narrow track running through it, straight, both ways, for leagues. Something sped along this track with a hurtling rush and roar. This something, that at first had looked like a red-eyed devil, with dark sides full of dim fire, resolved itself, as I watched it, presently, into a more conventional night express-train. It flew along, though, as no express-train ever travelled yet; for all that, I was able to keep it quite easily in view. I could count the carriages as they whirled by. One—two—three—four—five—six; but I could only see distinctly into one. Into that one with perfect distinctness. Into that one I seemed forced to look.

'It was the fourth carriage. Two people were in it. They sat in opposite corners; both were sleeping. The one who sat facing forwards was a woman—a girl, rather. I could see that; but I couldn't see her face. The blind was drawn across the lamp in the roof, and the light was very dim; moreover, this girl lay back in the shadow. Yet I seemed to know her, and I knew that her face was very fair. She wore a cloak that shrouded her form completely, yet her form was familiar to me.

'The figure opposite to her was a man's. Strangely familiar to me too this figure was. But, as he slept, his head had sunk upon his breast, and the shadow cast upon his face by the low-drawn travelling-cap he wore hid it from me. Yet if I had seemed to know the girl's face, I was certain I knew the man's. But as I could see, so I could remember, neither. And there was an absolute torture in this which I can't explain to you,—in this inability, and in my inability to wake them from their sleep.

'From the first I had been con-

scious of a desire to do that. This desire grew stronger every second. I tried to call to them, and my tongue wouldn't move. I tried to spring towards them, to thrust out my arms and touch them, and my limbs were paralysed. And then I tried to shut my eyes to what I *knew* must happen, and my eyes were held open and dragged to look on in spite of me. And I saw this :

'I saw the door of the carriage where these two sleepers, whose sleep was so horribly sound, were sitting—I saw this door open, and out of the thick darkness another face look in.

'The light, as I have said, was very dim, but I could see this face as plainly as I can see yours. A large yellow face it was, like a wax mask. The lips were full, and lustful and cruel. The eyes were little eyes of an evil gray. Thin yellow streaks marked the absence of the eyebrows ; thin yellow hair showed itself under a huge fur travelling-cap. The whole face seemed to grow slowly into absolute distinctness as I looked, by the sort of devilish light that it, as it were, radiated. I had chanced upon a good many damnable visages before then ; but there was a cold fiendishness about this one such as I had seen on no man's face, alive or dead, till then.

'The next moment the man this face belonged to was standing in the carriage, that seemed to plunge and sway more furiously, as though to waken them that still slept on. He wore a long fur travelling-robe, girt about the waist with a fur girdle. Abnormally tall and broad as he was, he looked in this dress gigantic. Yet there was a marvellous cat-like lightness and agility about all his movements.

'He bent over the girl lying there helpless in her sleep. I don't make rash bargains as a rule, but

I felt I would have given years of my life for five minutes of my lost freedom of limb just then. I tell you the torture was infernal.

'The assassin—I knew he was an assassin—bent awhile, gloatingly, over the girl. His great yellow hands were both bare, and on the forefinger of the right hand I could see some great stone blazing like an evil eye. In that right hand there gleamed something else. I saw him draw it slowly from his sleeve, and, as he drew it, turn round and look at the other sleeper with an infernal triumphant malignity and hate the Devil himself might have envied. But the man he looked at slept heavily on. And then—God ! I feel the agony I felt in my dream then now !—then I saw the great yellow hand, with the great evil eye upon it, lifted murderously, and the bright steel it held shimmer as the assassin turned again and bent his yellow face down closer to that other face hidden from me in the shadow—the girl's face, that I knew was so fair.

'How can I tell this? . . . The blade flashed and fell. . . There was the sound of a heavy sigh stifled under a heavy hand. . .

'Then the huge form of the assassin was reared erect, and the bloated yellow face seemed to laugh silently, while the hand that held the steel pointed at the sleeping man in diabolical menace.

'And so the huge form and the bloated yellow face seemed to fade away while I watched.

'The express rushed and roared through the blinding darkness without ; the sleeping man slept on still ; till suddenly a strong light fell full upon him, and he woke.

'And then I saw why I had been so certain that I knew him. For, as he lifted his head, I saw his face in the strong light.

'*And the face was my own face ; the sleeper was myself.*



Paul Devereux made a pause in his queer story here. Except when he had spoken of the girl, he had spoken in his usual cool, hard way. The pipe he had been smoking all the time was smoked out. He took time to fill another before he went on. I said never a word, for I guessed who the sleeping girl was.

'Well,' Paul remarked presently, 'that was a devilish queer dream, wasn't it? You'll account for it by telling me I'd been so pestered with the story of the banker's murder that I naturally had nightmare; perhaps, too, that my digestion was out of order. Call it a nightmare, call it dyspepsia, if you like. I *don't*, because— But you'll see why I don't directly.

'At the same moment that my dream-self awoke in my dream, my actual self woke in reality, and with the same ghastly horror.

'I say the *same* horror, for neither then nor afterwards could I separate my one self from my other self. They seemed identical; so that this queer dream made a more lasting impression upon me than you'd think. However, in the life I led that sort of thing couldn't last very long. Before I came back from Africa I had utterly forgotten all about it. Before I left Paris, though, and while it was quite fresh in my memory, I sketched the big murderer just as I had seen him in my dream. The great yellow face, the great broad frame in the fur travelling-robe, the great hand with the great evil eye upon it—everything, carefully and minutely, as though I had been going to paint a portrait that I wanted to make lifelike. I think at the time I had some such intention. If I had, I never fulfilled it. But I made the sketch, as I say, carefully; and then I forgot all about it.

'Time passed—three years near-

ly. I was wintering in the south of France that year. There it was that I met her—Lucille. Old D'Avray, her father, and I had met before in Algeria. He was dying now. He left the child on his death-bed to me. The end was I married her.

'Poor little thing! I think I might have made her happy—who knows? She used to tell me often she was happy with me. Poor little thing!

'Well, we were to come straight to London. That was Lucille's notion. She wanted to go to my London first—nowhere else. Now I would rather have gone anywhere else; but, naturally, I let the child have her way. She seemed nervously eager about it, I remembered afterwards; seemed to have a nervous objection to every other place I proposed. But I saw or suspected nothing to make me question her very closely, or the reasons for her preference for our grimy old Pandemonium. What could I suspect? Not the truth. If I only had! If I had only guessed what it was that made her, as she said, long to be safe there already. Safe? What had she to fear with me? Ah, what indeed!

'So we started on our journey to England. It was a cold, dark night, early in March. We reached Lyons somewhere about seven. I should have stayed there that night but for Lucille. She entreated me so earnestly and with such strange vehemence to go on by the night-mail to Paris, that at last, to satisfy her, I consented; though it struck me unpleasantly at the time that I had let her travel too long already, and that this feverishness was the consequence of over-fatigue. But she became pacified at once when I told her it should be as she wanted; and declared she should sleep perfectly well in the carriage

with me beside her. She should feel quite safe then, she said.

'Safe! Where safer? you might ask. Nowhere, I believed. Alone with me—surely nowhere safer. The Paris express was a short train that night; but I managed to secure a compartment for ourselves. I left Lucille in her corner there while I went across to the *buffet* to fill a flask. I was gone barely five minutes; but when I came back the change in the child's face fairly startled me. I had seen it last with the smile it always wore for me on it, looking so childishly happy in the lamp-light. Now it was all gray-pale and distorted; and the great blue eyes told me directly with what.

'Fear—sudden, terrible fear—I thought. But *fear*? Fear of what? I asked her. She clung close to me half-sobbing awhile before she could answer; and then she told me—nothing. There was nothing the matter; only she had felt a pain—a cruel pain—at her heart; and it had frightened her. Yes, that was it; it had frightened her, but it had passed; and she was well, quite well again now.

'All this time her eyes seemed to be telling me another story; but I said nothing; she was obviously too excited already. I did my best to soothe her, and I succeeded. She told me she felt quite well once more before we started. No, she had rather, much rather go on to Paris, as I had promised her she should. She should sleep all the way, if no one came into the carriage to disturb her. No one could come in? Then nothing could be better.

'And so it was that she and I started that night by the Paris mail.

'I made her up a bed of rugs and wraps upon the cushions; but she had rather rest her head upon my shoulder, she said, and feel my arm about her; nothing could hurt

her then. Ah, strange how she harped on that.

'She lay there, then, as she loved best—with her head resting on my shoulder, not sleeping much or soundly; uneasily, with sudden waking starts, and with glances round her; till I would speak to her. And then she would look up into my face and smile; and so drop into that uneasy sleep again. And I would think she was over-tired, that was all; and reproach myself with having let her come on. And three or four hours passed like this; and then we had got as far as Dijon.

'But the child was fairly worn out now; and she offered no opposition when I asked her to let me pillow her head on something softer than my shoulder. So I folded a great thick shawl she was too well cloaked to need, and she made that her pillow.

'We were rushing full swing through the wild, dark night, when she lifted up her face and bade me kiss her and bid her sleep well. And I put my arm round her, and kissed the child's loving lips—for the last time while she lived. Then I flung myself on the seat opposite her; and, watching her till she slept soundly and peacefully, slept at last myself also. I had drawn the blind across the lamp in the roof, and the light in the carriage was very dim.

'How long I slept I don't know; it couldn't have been more than an hour and a half, because the express was slackening speed for its first halt beyond Dijon. I had slept heavily I knew; but I woke with a sudden, sharp sense of danger that made me broad awake, and strung every nerve in a moment. The sort of feeling you have when you wake on a prairie, where you have come across "Indian sign;" on outpost-duty, when



your *feldwebel* plucks gently at your cloak. You know what I mean.

'I was on my feet at once. As I said, the light in the carriage was very dim, and the shadow was deepest where Lucille lay. I looked there instinctively. She must have moved in her sleep, for her face was turned away from me; and the cloak I had put so carefully about her had partly fallen off. But she slept on still. Only soundly, very soundly; she scarcely seemed to breathe. And—*did* she breathe?

'A ghastly fear ran through my blood, and froze it. I understood why I had wakened. In my nostrils was an awful odour that I knew well enough. I bent over her; I touched her. Her face was very cold; her eyes glared glassily at me; my hands were wet with something. My hands were wet with blood—her blood!

'I tore away the blind from the lamp, and then I could see that my wife of a week lay there stabbed straight to the heart—dead—dead beyond doubting; murdered in her sleep.'

Devereux's stern, low voice shook ever so little as he spoke those last words; and we both sat very silent after them for a good while. Only when he could trust his utterance again he went on.

'A curious piece of devilry, wasn't it? That child—whom had she ever harmed? Who could hate her like this? I remember I thought that, in a dull, confused sort of way, when I found myself alone in that carriage with her lying dead on the cushions before me. *Alone* with her—you understand? It was confusing.

'I pass over what immediately followed. The express came duly to a halt; and then I called people to me, and—the Paris express went on without that particular carriage.

'The inquiry began before some local authority next day. Very little came of it. What could come of it, unless they had convicted *me* of the murder of this child I would have given my own life to save?

'They might have done that at home; but they knew better here, and didn't. They couldn't find me the actual assassin, however; though I believe they did their best. All they found was his weapon, which he must purposely have left behind. I asked for this, and got it. It gave their police no clue; and it gave me none. But I had a fancy for it.

'It was a plain, double-edged, admirably-tempered dagger—a very workmanlike article indeed. On the cross hilt of it I swore one day that I would live thenceforth for one thing alone—the discovery of the murderer of old D'Avray's child, whom I had promised him to care for before all. When I had found this man, whoever he was, I also swore that I would kill him. Kill him myself, you understand; without any of the law's delay or uncertainty, without troubling *bourreau* or hangman. Kill him as he had killed her—to do this was what I meant to live for. There was war to the knife between him and me.

'I started, of course, under one heavy disadvantage. He knew me, probably, whereas I didn't know him at all. When he found that his amiable intention of fixing the crime on me had been frustrated, it must, I imagined, have occurred to him that the said crime might eventually be fixed by me on him. And he had proved himself to be a person who didn't stick at trifles. It behoved me, therefore, to go to work cautiously. But I hadn't fought Indians for nothing; and I *was* very cautious. I waited quiet till I got a clue. It was a curious one; and I got it in this way. It

struck me one day, suddenly, that I had heard of a murder precisely similar to this already. I could not at first call the thing to mind; but presently I remembered—my dream. And then I asked myself this: *Had not this murder been done before my eyes three years ago?*

'I came to the conclusion that the circumstances of the murder in my dream were absolutely identical with the circumstances of the actual crime. Yes; the girl whose face in that dream I had never been able to see was Lucille. Yes; the assassin whose face I had seen so plainly in that dream was the real assassin. In short, I believe that the murder had been *rehearsed* before me three years previous to its actual committal.

'Now this sounds rather wild. Yet I came to this conviction quite coolly and deliberately. It *was* a conviction. Assuming it to be true, the odds against me grew shorter directly; *for I had the portrait of the man I wanted drawn by myself the day after I had seen him in my dream.* And the original of that portrait was a man not to be easily mistaken, supposing him to exist at all. The day I came across that sketch of him in that old forgotten sketch-book of mine, I was as sure he did exist as that I was alive myself. What I had to do was to find this man, and then I never doubted I should find the man I wanted. You see how the odds had shortened. If he knew me I knew him now, and he had no notion that I did know him. It was a good deal fairer fight between us.

'I fought it out alone. My story was hardly one the Rue de Jérusalem would have acted upon; and, besides, I wanted no interference. So, with the portrait before me, I sat down and began to consider who this man was, and why he had murdered that child. The

big, burly frame, the heavy yellow face, the sandy-yellow hair, the physiognomy generally, was Teutonic. My man I put down as a North German. Now there were, and are probably, plenty of men who would have no objection whatever to put a knife into me, if they got the chance; but this man, whom I had never met, could have had no such quarrel as theirs with me. His quarrel with me must have been, then, Lucille. Yes, that was it—Lucille. I began to see clearly: a thwarted, devilish passion—a cool, infernal revenge. The child had feared something of this sort; had perhaps seen him that night. This explained her nervous terror, her nervous anxiety to stop nowhere, to travel on. In that carriage of that express-train, alone with me—where could she be safer? This accounted, too, for her anxiety to reach England. He would not dare follow her there, she had thought, or, at least, could not without my noticing him. And then she would have told me. She had not told me before evidently because she had feared for *me* too, in a quarrel with this man. She must, innocent child as she was, have had some instinctive knowledge of what he was capable. . . . Ay, a cool, infernal revenge, indeed. To kill her; to fix the murder on me. That dagger he had left behind. . . . The apparent impossibility of anyone's entering the carriage as he must have entered it at all, to say nothing of the almost absolute impossibility of his doing so without disturbing either of us,—you see it might have gone hard with me if a British jury had had to decide on the case.

'Well, to cut this as short as may be, I made up my mind that the man I wanted was a North German; that he had conceived a hideous passion for Lucille before



I knew her; that she had shrunk from it and him so unmistakably, that he knew he had no chance; that my taking her away as my wife, to which he might have been a witness, drove him to as hideous a revenge; that, hearing we were going to England, and seeing that we were likely to stop nowhere on the way, and so give him a chance of doing what he had made up his mind to do, he had decided to do what he had done as he had done it,—counting on finding us asleep as he had found us, or on his strength if it came to a fight between him and me; but coolly reckless enough to brave everything in any case. And the devil aiding, he had in great part and only too well succeeded. He was now either so far satisfied that, if I made no move against him—and how, he might think, could I?—he, feeling himself all safe, would let me be; or, on the other hand, he did not feel safe, and was not satisfied, and was arranging for my being disposed of by and by. I considered the latter frame of mind as his most probable one; I went to work cautiously, as I say. I ascertained that Lucille had made no mention of any obnoxious *prétendant* at any time; I didn't expect to find she had, her terror of the man was too intense. But this man must have met her somewhere—where?

'When old D'Avray came home to die, his daughter was just leaving her Paris *pensionnat*. All through his last illness he had seen no visitor but me, and Lucille had never quitted him. Besides, I had been there all the time. I presumed, then, that this man and she had met in Paris; and I believe they were only likely to have met at one of the half-dozen houses where the child would now and again be asked. I got a list of all these. One name only struck me;

it happened to be a German name—Steinmetz. I wondered if Monsieur Steinmetz was my man. In the mean time, who was he? I had no trouble in finding that out: Monsieur Steinmetz was a German banker of good standing and repute, reasonably well off, and recently left a widower. Personally? *Dame*, personally Monsieur Steinmetz was a great man and a fat, with a big face and blond hair, and the appearance of what he really was—a *bon vivant* and a *bon enfant* yet *n'avait jamais fait de mal à personne—allez!* Ah, yes; in effect, Madame had died about a year ago, and Monsieur had been inconsolable for a long time. He had changed his residence now, and inhabited a house in one of the new streets off the Champs Elysées.

'From another source I discovered that in the lifetime of Madame Steinmetz Lucille was frequently at the house. She had ceased to come there about the date of the commencement of Madame's sudden illness. I got this information by degrees, while I lay *perdu* in an old haunt of mine in the Pays Latin yonder; for I had always had an idea that I should find the man I wanted in Paris. When I had got it, I thought I should like to see Monsieur Steinmetz, the agreeable banker. One night I strolled up as far as his new residence in the street off the Champs Elysées. Monsieur Steinmetz lived on the first-floor. There was a brilliant light there: Monsieur Steinmetz was entertaining friends, it seemed.

'It was a fine night; I established myself out of sight under the doorway of an unfinished house opposite, and waited. I don't know why; perhaps I fancied that when his friends were gone, the fineness of the night might induce Monsieur Steinmetz to take a stroll,

and that then I should be able to gratify my curiosity. You see, I knew that if he were my man, I should know him directly. I waited a good while : shadows crossed the lighted blinds ; once a big, broad shadow appeared there, that made me fancy I mightn't have been waiting for nothing after all, somehow. Presently Monsieur Steinmetz's guests departed, and in a little while after there appeared on the little balcony of Monsieur Steinmetz's apartment *the man I wanted*. There was a moon that night, and the cold white light fell on the great yellow face, with the full lustful lips, and the full cruel chin, just as I had seen the light fall on it in my dream. It was the same face, Bertie ; the same face, the same man. I couldn't be mistaken. I had no doubt ; I *knew* that the assassin of my wife, of that tender, innocent, helpless child, stood there, twenty yards from me, on that balcony.

'I had got myself pretty well in hand ; and it was as well. I never moved. The face I knew turned presently towards the spot where I stood hidden,—the face I had seen in my dream, beyond all doubting. The evil gray eyes glanced carelessly into the shadow, and up and down the quiet street ; and then Monsieur Steinmetz, humming an air, got inside the window again, and closed it after him. Once more the great burly shadow that had at first told me I should not wait in that dark doorway in vain crossed the blinds ; and then it disappeared. I saw my man no more that night ; but I had seen enough. I knew who he was now, and where to find him.

'As I walked along home I thought what I would do. I quite meant to kill Monsieur Steinmetz ; but I also meant to have no *démêlés* with an Impérial Procureur and the Cour d'Assizes for doing

so. I didn't want to murder him, either. I thought I would wait a little for the chance of a suitable opportunity for settling my business satisfactorily. And I did wait. I turned this delay to account, and got together a case of circumstantial evidence against my man that, though perhaps it might have broken down in a law-court, would have been alone amply sufficient for me.

'The reason why Lucille's visits to the banker's house ceased was, it appeared, because Madame Steinmetz had conceived all at once a jealous dislike to her. How far this was owing to Lucille herself I could well understand ; but I could understand Madame's jealousy equally well. Madame's illness, strangely sudden, dated from the cessation of Lucille's visits. Was it hard to find a *cause* for that illness—a cause for the wife's subsequent suspected death ? I thought not. Then had followed Lucille's departure from Paris. The child's anxiety for her father hid her *other fear* from his eyes and mine ; but that fear must have been on her then. With us she forgot it in time ; yet it or another reason had always prevented all mention of what had occasioned it. She became my wife. At that very time I easily ascertained that Steinmetz was absent from Paris ; less easily, but indubitably, that he had, at all events, been as far south as Lyons. At Lyons it must have been that Lucille first discovered he was dogging us. Hence her alarm, which I had remembered, and her anxiety to proceed on our journey without stopping for the night, as I had previously arranged. The morning after the murder Steinmetz reappeared in Paris. From the hour at which he was seen at the *gare*, it was certain that he had travelled by the night express—

train in which Lucille and I had started from Lyons; and he wore that morning a travelling-coat of fur in all respects similar to the one I remembered so well.

'If I had ever had any doubt of my man after actually seeing him, I should probably have convinced myself that he was my man by the general tendency of these facts, which I got at slowly and one by one. But I had no need of such evidence; and of course no case, even with such evidence, for a court of law. However, courts of law I had never intended to trouble in the matter.

'The opportunity I was waiting was some time before it offered. Monsieur Steinmetz was a man of regular habits, I found—from his first-floor in the street off the Champs Elysées, every morning at eleven, to the Bourse; thence to his bureau hard by till four; from his bureau to his café, where he read papers and played dominoes till six; and then home slowly by the Boulevards. He might consider himself tolerably safe from me while he led this sort of life, even supposing he was aware he was incurring any danger. I don't think he troubled much about that; till one night, when, over the count of the beloved domino-points, his eyes met mine fixed right upon him. I had arranged this little surprise to see how it would affect him.

'Perhaps my gaze may have expressed something more than the mere distraction I intended; but I noticed—though a more indifferent observer might easily have failed to notice—how the great yellow face, expanded in childish interest in the childish game, seemed suddenly to grow gray and harden; how the fat smile became a cruel barring of sharp white teeth; how the fat chin squared itself. The man knew me, and scented danger.

'A moment's reflection convinced Monsieur Steinmetz, though, that it could be by no means so certain that I knew him; five minutes' observation of me more than half satisfied him that I did not. Yet what did I want there? What was I doing in Paris? This might concern him nearly, he must have thought.

'I kept my own face in order, and watched his. It wasn't an easy one to read; but, you see, I had studied it closely, and in a way he couldn't have dreamed of. Monsieur Steinmetz was outwardly his wonted self, but inwardly not quite comfortable when he rose; and I saw the evil eye gleam on his great yellow finger, as he took out his purse to pay the *garçon*, just as I had seen it when that finger pointed at *myself* in my dream. I felt curious sensations, Bertie, as I sat there and looked abstractedly at Monsieur Steinmetz. I wondered how long it would be before— But my time hadn't come yet. He went out without another glance at me. I saw his huge form on the other side of the street when I left the café in my turn. This I had expected. Monsieur Steinmetz was naturally curious. It was hardly possible that I could know him; but it was quite certain that he ought to know all about me. So, when I moved on, he moved on; in short, Monsieur Steinmetz dogged me up one street and down another, till he finally dogged me home to my hiding-place in the Pays Latin. He did it very well, too—much better than you would have expected from so apparently unwieldy a *mouchard*. But I remembered how lightly he could move.

'Next day I had, of course, disappeared from my old quarters, and gone no one knew where. I suppose Monsieur Steinmetz didn't



like this fact when he heard of it. It might have seemed suspicious. Suppose I *had* recognised him? In that case I had evidently a little game of my own, and was as evidently desirous to keep it dark. He was a cool hand; but I fancy my man began to get a little uneasy. He took some trouble to find me again. After a while I permitted him to do that. Once found, he seemed determined that I should not be lost sight of again for want of watching. I permitted that, too; it helped play my game, and I wanted to bring it to an end. To which intent, Monsieur Steinmetz got to hear from sources best known to himself as much of my plans as should bring him to the state I wanted. That was a murderous state. I wanted to get him to think that I was dangerous enough to be worth putting out of the way. I presume he was aware there were, or would be, weak joints in his armour, impenetrable as it seemed; and he preferred not risking the ordeal of legal battle if he could help it. At all events, he elected at last to rid himself of a person who might be dangerous, and was troublesome, by the shortest and the simplest means.

'I say so because when, believing my man was ripe for this, I left Paris about midday for a certain secluded little spot on the sea-coast, I saw one of Monsieur Steinmetz's *employés* on the platform; and because, two days after my arrival in my secluded spot, I met Monsieur Steinmetz in person, newly arrived also. Now this was exactly what I had intended and anticipated. Monsieur Steinmetz had come down there to put me out of his way, if he could. He passed me, leisurely strolling in the opposite direction, humming his favourite *aria*, bigger and yellower than ever, the evil eye fiery on his

finger. His own eyes shot me as evil fire; but he said nothing. . . . I saw he was ripe, though. . . . My time was close at hand.

'It came. Monsieur Steinmetz and I met once more in the very place where I, knowing my ground, had intended we should meet. It was a dip in the cliffs like a hollowed palm, and just there the cliff jutted out a good bit, with a sheer fall on to the rocks below. It was a gray afternoon, at the end of summer. The wind was rising fast; there was a thunder of heavy waves already.

'I think he had been dogging me; but I hadn't chosen to let him get up to me till now. We were quite out of sight when he had reached the level bottom of the dip, where I had halted—quite out of sight, and quite alone. To do him justice, he came on steadily enough. His face was liker the sketch I had made of it, liker the face I had seen in my dream, than it had ever looked before. Evidently he had made up his mind. . . . At last, then! . . . Well, I had been waiting long! . . . He was close beside me.

"*Ah! bon jour, cher Monsieur Steinmetz.*"

"So?" he said, his little eyes contracting like a cobra's. "Ah! Monsieur knows my name?"

"Amongst other things about you—yes."

"So?" The yellow face was turning grayer and harder every minute—liker and liker to my likeness of it. "And what other things? Has it never appeared to you that this you do, have been doing—this meddling, may be dangerous, *hein?*"

'He had changed his tone, as he had changed the person in which he addressed me. Yes, he had certainly made up his mind. And his big right hand was hidden inside his waistcoat, so that I could

not see the evil eye I knew was on his finger.

"Dangerous?" he repeated slowly.

"Possibly."

"Ay, surely; I shall crush you!"

"Try."

"In good time; wait. You plot against me. Take care; I am strong; I warn you. There must be an end of this, you understand, or—"

"He nodded his big head significantly.

"You are right," I told him; "there must be an end. It is coming."

"So?"

"Yes; I know you. You know me now."

"I know you. What do you want?"

"To kill you."

"So?"

"Yes; as you killed her."

"As I killed her? That is it, then? You know that?"

"I know that."

"Well, it is true. I killed her. Now you can guess what I am going to do to you—to you, curse you!—whom she loved."

"The very face I had seen in my dream now, Bertie, the very face! There was something besides the evil eye that gleamed in his right hand when he drew it from his breast. Once more he spoke.

"Yes, I killed her. I meant worse for you. You escaped that; but you will not escape me now. Fool! were you mad to do this? Did not I hate you enough? And I would have let you be. Ah, die, then, if you will have it so!"

"His heavy right arm swung high as he spoke, and I saw the sharp steel gleam as it turned to fall. And I twisted from his grip, and caught the falling arm, and bent it till the dagger dropped to the ground. And then, for a fierce, desperate, devilish minute, I had him in my clutch, dragging him nearer the smooth, slippery edge. He was no match for me at this I knew, and he knew; but he held me with the hold of his despair, and I could not loose myself. Both of us together, he meant; but not I. Yet I only freed myself just as he rolled exhausted, but clutching at the tough, short bushes wildly, towards the brink, and partly over it. . . . Only the hold of his hands between him and his death. And I knelt above him, with the knife in my hand that was stained with *her* blood.

"The great yellow face, ashen now in its mortal agony, looked silently up at me for three or four awful seconds; and then—then it disappeared.

"Bah!" Paul concluded, "that was the end of it."

## CATHERINE'S QUEST.

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IMAGINE to yourself an old, rambling, red-brick house, with odd corners and gables here and there, all bound and clasped together with ivy, and you have Craymoor Grange. It was built long before Queen Elizabeth's time, and that illustrious monarch is said to have slept in it in one of her royal progresses—as where has she not slept?

There still remain some remnants of bygone ages, although it has been much modernised and added to in later days. Among these are the brewhouse and laundry—formerly, it is said, dining-hall and ball-room. The latter of these is chiefly remarkable for an immense arched window, such as you see in churches, with five lights.

When we came to the Grange this window had been partially blocked up, and in front of it, up to one-third of its height, was a wooden dais, or platform, on which stood a cumbrous mangle, left there, I suppose, by the last tenants of the house.

Of these last tenants we knew very little, for it was so long since it had been inhabited that the oldest authority in the village could not remember it.

There were, however, some half-defaced monuments in the village church of Craymoor, bearing the figures and escutcheons of knights and dames of 'the old family,' as the villagers said; but the inscriptions were worn and almost illegible, and for some time we none of us took the pains to decipher them.

We first came to Craymoor Grange in the summer of 1849, my husband having discovered the place in one of his rambles, and taken a fancy to it. At first I certainly thought we could never make it our home, it was so dilapidated and tumble-down; but by the time winter came on we had had several repairs done and alterations made, and the rooms really became quite presentable.

As our family was small we confined ourselves chiefly to the newest part of the house, leaving the older rooms to the mice, dust, and darkness. We made use of two of the old rooms, however, one as a servants' bedroom and the other as an extra spare chamber, in case of many visitors. For myself, though I hope I am neither nervous nor superstitious, I confess that I would rather sleep in 'our wing,' as we called the part of the house we inhabited, than in any of the old rooms.

When Catherine l'Estrange came to us, however, during our first Christmas at Craymoor, I found that she was troubled with no such fancies, but declared that she delighted in queer old rooms, with raftered ceilings and deep window-seats, such as ours, and begged to be allowed to occupy the spare chamber. This I readily acceded to, as we had several visitors, and needed all the available rooms.

As my story has principally to do with Catherine l'Estrange, I suppose I ought to speak more fully about her. She was an old school-friend of my daughter Ella, and at



the time of which I am speaking was just one-and-twenty, and the merriest girl I ever knew. She had stayed with us once or twice before we came to the Grange, but we then knew no other particulars concerning her family, than that her father had been an Indian officer, and that he and her mother had both died in India when she was about six years old, leaving her to the care of an aunt living in England.

I now, after a long, and I fear a tedious, preamble, come to my story.

On the eve of the new year of 1850, Catherine had a very bad sore throat, and was obliged, though sorely against her inclination, to stay in bed all day, and forego our small evening gaiety.

At about six o'clock P.M., Ella took her some tea, and fearing she would be dull, offered to stay with her during the evening. This, however, Catherine would not hear of. 'You go and entertain your company,' said she laughingly, 'and leave me to my own devices; I feel very lazy, and I dare say I shall go to sleep.' As she had not slept much on the preceding night, Ella thought it was the best thing she could do; so she went out by the door leading on to the corridor, first placing the night-lamp on a table behind the door opening on to the laundry, so that it might not shine in her face.

She did not again visit Catherine's room until reminded to do so by my son George, at about half-past ten. She then rapped at the door, and receiving no answer, opened it softly, and approached the bed. Catherine lay quite still, and Ella imagined her to be asleep. She therefore returned to the drawing-room without disturbing her.

As it was New Year's-eve, we stayed up 'to see the old year

out and the new year in,' and at a few minutes to twelve we all gathered round the open window on the stairs to hear the chimes ring out from the village church.

We were all listening breathlessly as the hall-clock struck twelve, when a piercing cry suddenly echoed through the house, causing us all to start in alarm. I knew that it could only proceed from Catherine's room, for the servants were all assembled at the window beneath us, listening, like ourselves, for the chimes. Thither therefore I flew, followed by Ella, and we found poor Catherine in a truly pitiable state.

She was deadly pale, in an agony of terror, and the perspiration stood in large drops upon her forehead. It was some time before we could succeed at all in composing her, and her first words were to implore us to take her into another room.

She was too weak to stand, so we wrapped her in blankets, and carried her into Ella's bedroom. I noticed that as she was taken through the laundry she shuddered, and put her hands before her eyes. When she was laid on Ella's bed she grew calmer, and apologised for the trouble she had caused, saying that she had had a dreadful dream.

With this explanation we were fain to be content, though I thought it hardly accounted for her excessive terror. I had observed, however, that any allusion to what had passed caused her to tremble and turn pale again, and I thought it best to refrain from exciting her further.

When morning came I found Catherine almost her usual self again; but I persuaded her to remain in bed until the evening, as her cold was not much better. Ella's curiosity to hear the dream which had so much excited her

friend could now no longer be restrained; but whenever she asked to hear it, Catherine said, "Not now; another time, perhaps, I may tell you."

When she came down to dinner in the evening, we noticed that she was peculiarly silent, and we endeavoured to rally her into her usual spirits, but in vain. She tried to laugh and to appear merry, poor child; but there was evidently something on her mind.

At last, as we all sat round the fire after dinner, she spoke. She addressed herself to my husband, but the tone of her voice caused us all to listen.

'Mr. Fanshawe, I have something to ask of you,' said she, and then paused.

'Ask on,' said Mr. Fanshawe.

'I know that you will think the request I am going to make a peculiar one; but I have a particular reason for making it,' continued she. 'It is that you will have the wooden daïs in front of the laundry window removed.'

Mr. Fanshawe certainly was taken aback, as were we all. When he had mastered his bewilderment, and assured himself that he had heard aright—

'It is, indeed, a strange request, my dear Catherine,' said he; 'what can be your reason for asking such a thing?'

'If you will only have it done, and not question me, you will understand my reason,' answered Catherine.

Mr. Fanshawe demurred, however, thinking it some foolish whim, and at last Catherine said:

'I must tell you why I wish it done, then: I am sure we shall discover something underneath.'

At this we all looked at one another in extreme bewilderment.

'Discoversomethingunderneath? No doubt we should—cobwebs, probably, and dust and spiders,'

answered Mr. Fanshawe, much amused.

But Catherine was not to be laughed down.

'Only do as I wish,' said she beseechingly, 'and you will see. If you find nothing underneath the daïs but cobwebs and dust, then you may laugh at me as much as you like.' And I saw that she was serious, for tears were actually gathering in her eyes. Of course we were all very anxious to know what Catherine expected to find, and how she came to suspect that there was anything to be found; but she would not say, and begged us all not to question her.

And now George took upon himself to interfere.

'Let us do as Catherine wishes, father,' said he; 'the daïs spoils the laundry, and would be much better away.'

'Well, well,' said Mr. Fanshawe, 'do as you like, only I shall expect my share of the treasure that is found.—And now,' added he, 'you must have a glass of wine to warm you, Catherine, for you look sadly pale, child.'

Here the conversation changed, though we often alluded to the subject again during the evening.

The next morning the first thing in all our thoughts was Catherine's singular request.

I think Mr. Fanshawe had hoped she would have forgotten it, but such was not the case; on the contrary, she enlisted George's services the first thing after breakfast to carry out her design, and they left the room together, accompanied by Ella.

It was a snowy morning, and Mr. Fanshawe was obliged to be away from home all day on business, so I was quite at a loss how to entertain my numerous guests successfully. Happily for me, however, the mystery attendant on the removal of the daïs in the laundry

charmed them all; and I have to thank Catherine for contributing to their amusement much better than I could possibly have done.

Not long after the disappearance of Catherine, Ella, and George, a message was sent to us in the drawing-room requesting our presence in the laundry; and on all flocking there with more or less eagerness, we found a fire burning on the old-fashioned hearth and chairs arranged round it.

It appeared that with the help of Sam, our factotum, who was a kind of Jack-of-all-trades, George had succeeded in loosening the planks of the dais, which, although strongly put together, were rotten and worm-eaten, and that we were now summoned to be witnesses of its removal. We found Catherine trembling with a strange eagerness, and her face quite pale with excitement. This was shared by Ella and George; and, judging by the important expression on their faces, I fancied they were let further into the secret than anyone else.

We all sat down in the chairs placed for our accommodation, and the wild whistling of the wind in the huge chimney, together with the sheets of snow which darkened the window-panes, enhanced the mystery of the whole affair, whilst George and his coadjutor worked lustily on.

At length, after a great deal of panting and puffing, George was heard to exclaim, 'Now for the tug of war!' and there followed a minute's pause, and then a crash as the loosened planks were torn asunder, and a cloud of dust enveloped both workmen and spectators.

Involuntarily we all started forward, and a moment of the direst confusion ensued, during which the boys of our party greatly endangered their limbs amongst the broken boards.

'By George!' exclaimed my son at last—in his eagerness invoking his patron saint—as he stumbled upon something, 'there is something here and no mistake;' and, hastily clearing away the rubbish and clinging cobwebs, he disclosed to view what proved on examination to be an immense oaken chest, about four feet in height, heavily carved, and ornamented with brass mouldings corroded with age and damp.

Here was a piece of excitement indeed; never in my most imaginative moments had I thought of anything so mysterious as this. The most sceptical amongst us grew interested.

'O, do open it!' cried Ella, when the first exclamations of surprise were over.

'Easier to say than to do, miss,' replied Sam, exerting his Herculean strength in vain. With the aid of a hammer and the kitchen-poker, however, he at last succeeded in forcing it open. We all pressed forward eagerly to peer inside. There was something in it certainly, but we none of us could determine what, until Sam, who was the boldest of us all, thrust in his hand and brought forth—something which caused the bravest to start with horror, whilst poor Catherine sank down, white and trembling, upon the littered floor. It was a bone, to which adhered fragments of decaying silk.

The consternation and conjectures which followed can be better imagined than described. Seeing the effects of the discovery upon Catherine, and indeed upon all, I bade Sam replace it in the chest, which George closed again, to be left until Mr. Fanshawe came home and could investigate the matter.

The rest of the day I passed in attending to Catherine, who seemed much shocked and overcome by what she had seen, and in trying

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to divert my guests' thoughts from the subject, and dispel the gloom which had gathered over all. In this I succeeded only partially, and never did I welcome my husband's return more gladly than on that evening.

On his arrival I would not let him be disturbed by the relation of what had happened until he had finished his dinner, and it was not till we were gathered as usual round the fire that George related the whole story to him.

When he ended the two gentlemen left the room together, in order that Mr. Fanshawe might verify by his own eyes what he would hardly believe.

They were some time gone, and on their return I noticed that my husband held in his hand an old piece of soiled parchment, with mouldy seals affixed to it.

'We certainly have discovered much more than I thought for, Catherine,' said he, 'and possibly more than you thought for either.' Here he paused for her to reply, but she did not.

'The bones are most probably those of some animal,' added he—I fancied I could detect a certain anxiety in his tone that belied what he said; 'but in order to quell the active imaginations which I can see are running away with some of you'—here he looked round with a smile—'I will send for Dr. Driscoll to come and examine them to-morrow. I have also found a piece of parchment in the chest,' he added; 'but I have not yet looked at its contents.'

'Before you do that, Mr. Fanshawe, and before you send for the surgeon,' interrupted Catherine suddenly in a clear voice, 'I think I can tell you all about the bones found in the chest, and how I guessed them to be there.'

'I should certainly be very glad to be told,' my husband admitted,

much surprised; 'though how you can possibly know, I cannot surmise.'

'Listen, and I will tell you,' answered Catherine; and feeling very glad that our curiosity was at last to be gratified, we all 'pricked up our ears,' as George would say, to listen.

I here transcribe Catherine's story word for word, as my son George subsequently wrote it down from her dictation.

'You all remember,' she began, 'my alarming you on New Year's-eve at midnight, and that I told you I was disturbed by a dreadful dream.'

'I said so because I thought you would make fun of me if I called it a vision; and yet it was much more like a vision, for I seemed to see it waking, and it was more vivid and consecutive than any dream I ever had.'

'Before I try to describe it, I want you all to understand that I seemed intuitively to comprehend what I saw, and to recognise all the figures which appeared before me, and their relation to one another, though I am sure I never beheld them before in my life.'

'When Ella left me that night, I lay propped up with pillows, staring idly at the strange shadows thrown by the hidden lamp across the laundry ceiling and over the floor. As I looked it seemed to me that a change came over the room—a most unaccountable change.'

'Instead of the blocked-up window, the rusty mangle, and the dais at the farther end, I saw the window clear and distinct from top to bottom, and in front of a deep window-seat at its base stood an oaken chest, exactly corresponding to the one discovered this morning. The room seemed brilliantly lighted, and everything was clearly and

distinctly visible; and not only was it changed, but also peopled.

'Many figures passed up and down; brocaded silks swept the floor, and old-world forms of men in strange costumes bowed in courtly style to the dames by their side. Among all these figures I noticed only one couple particularly, and I knew them to be bride and bridegroom. The man was tall and broad, with dark hair and eyes, and a sensual and cruel face. He seemed, however, to be quite enslaved by the woman by his side, whom I hardly even now like to think of, there was something to me so repellent in her presence.

'She was tall and of middle age, and would have been handsome were it not for a sinister expression in her dark flashing eyes, which was enhanced by the black eyebrows which met over them.

'She reminded me irresistibly of the effigy on the stone monument in Craymoor church, which Ella and I named "the wicked woman."

'As I gazed on the strange scene before me I presently became aware of three other figures which I had not noticed before. They were standing in a small arched doorway in one corner of the room (where the servants' bedroom now is) furtively watching the gay company. One was a pale, careworn woman, apparently of about five-and-thirty, still beautiful, though haggard and mournful-looking, with blue eyes and a fair complexion.

'Her hands rested on the shoulders of two children, one a boy and the other a girl, of about ten and eleven years of age respectively. They much resembled their mother, and, like her, they were meanly dressed, though no poverty of attire could hide the nobility of their aspect. I noticed that the mother's eyes rested chiefly on the face of

the tall stately man before mentioned, who seemed unaware or careless of her presence; and instinctively I knew him to be the father of her children and the blighter of her life.

'As I looked and beheld all this, the lights vanished, the company disappeared, and the room became dark and deserted. No, not quite deserted, for I presently distinguished, seated on the window-seat by the old oaken chest, the fair woman and her children again.

'The moonlight now streamed through the window upon the woman's face, making it appear more ghastly and haggard than before. In her long thin fingers she was holding up to the light a necklace of large pearls, curiously interwoven in a diamond pattern, and on this the children's eyes were fixed.

'She then hung it on the girl's fair neck, who hid it in her bosom. Both children then twined their arms round their mother and kissed her repeatedly, whilst her head sank lower and lower, and the paleness of death overspread her features.

'This scene faded away as the other had done, and I saw the fair woman no more.

'Then it seemed to me that many figures passed and repassed before the window—the wicked woman (as I shall call her to distinguish her), accompanied by a boy the image of herself, whom I knew to be her son. He was apparently older than the fair-haired children, who also passed to and fro, attired as servants, and generally employed in some menial work.

'At last the wicked woman's son, with haughty gestures, ordered the other boy to pick up something that lay on the ground, and when he refused, he raised his cane as though to strike him. Before he could do so, however, the boy flew

at him, and they engaged in a fierce struggle.

'In the midst of this the wicked woman, whom I had learnt to dread, came forward and separated them; after which she pointed imperiously to the door, and signed to the younger boy to go out.

'He obeyed her mandate, but first threw his arms round his sister in a last embrace, and she detached the pearl necklace from off her neck and gave it to him. He then went out, waving a last adieu to her, and I saw him no more.

'Confused images seemed to crowd before me after this, and I remember nothing clearly until I beheld an infirm and tottering figure led away through the arched doorway, in whom I recognised the tall and stately man I had first seen in company with the wicked woman, but who was now an old man, apparently being supported to his bed to die. As he passed out he laid one trembling hand upon the head of the fair girl, now a blooming woman, and a softer shade came over his face. This the wicked woman noted, and she marked her disapproval by a vindictive frown.

'She also was older-looking, but age had in no degree softened her features; on the contrary, they appeared to me to wear a harsher expression than before.

'In the next scene which came before me, the wicked woman's son was evidently making love to the girl. Both were standing by the old window-seat, but her face was resolutely turned away from him, and when she at last looked at him it was with an expression of uncontrollable horror and dislike.

'Again this scene changed as those before it had done; the young man was gone, and only the light of a grated lantern illumined the room, or rather made darkness visible. The wicked woman was

the only occupant of the laundry; she was kneeling by the oaken chest, trying to raise the heavy lid. In her left hand she held a piece of parchment, with large red seals pendent from it. I knew it to be the old man's will which she was hiding, thus defrauding the just claimants of their rights.

'Her hands trembled, and her whole appearance denoted guilty trepidation. At length, however, the lid was raised, but just as she was about to replace the parchment in the chest, a figure glided silently from a dark corner of the window-seat and confronted her. It was the fair girl, pale, resolute, and extending her hand to claim the will.

'After the first guilty start, which caused her to drop the parchment into the chest, the wicked woman hurriedly tried to close the lid. Her efforts were frustrated, however, by the girl, who leant with all her force upon it, keeping it back, and still held out her hand as before.

'There followed a pause, which seemed to me very long, but which could in reality have only lasted a minute.

'It was broken by the wicked woman, who, hastily casting a glance behind her into the gloom of the darkened chamber, then seized the girl by the arm and dragged her with all her force into the chest. It was but the work of a moment, for the woman was much the more powerful of the two, and the poor victim was too much taken by surprise to make much resistance. I saw one despairing look in her face as her murderess flashed the lantern before it with a hideous gleam of triumph.

'Then the lid was pressed down upon her, and I saw no more, only I felt an unutterable terror, and tried in vain to scream.

'This was not all the vision,



however, for before I had mastered my terror the scene was superseded by another.

'This time it was twilight, and the wicked woman and her son were together. The son seemed to be talking eagerly, and grew more and more excited, whilst the mother stood still and erect, with a malicious smile upon her lips. Presently she moved towards the chest with a fell purpose in her eyes, unlocked it with a key which hung from her girdle, raised the lid and disclosed the contents.

'I understood it all now: the son was asking for the girl whom he had loved, and whom on his return home he missed, and the wicked woman, enraged at hearing for the first time that he had loved her, was determined to have her revenge.

'He should see her again.

'On beholding the dread contents of the chest, the man staggered back horrified; then, doubtless comprehending the case, he turned suddenly upon the murderess, and threw his arm around her, and there ensued a struggle terrible to witness.

'Her proud triumphant glance of malice was now succeeded by one of abject fear, and, as his strength began to gain the mastery, of despair.

'His iron frame heaved for a moment with the violence of his efforts, the next he had forced her down into the chest upon the mouldering body of her victim. I saw her eyes light up with the terror of death for one second, and then her screams were stifled for ever beneath the massive lid.

'The horror of this scene was too much for me; I found voice to scream at last, and I suppose it was my cry which alarmed you all.'

When Catherine ceased speaking there was a profound silence for a

minute, which Mr. Fanshawe was the first to break as he said with a peculiar intonation in his voice, 'It is very strange, very unaccountable,' reëchoing all our thoughts.

Now it happened that Mr. Fleet, our family lawyer, was among our guests that Christmas-time, and since the discovery of the chest and bones had taken a great interest in the whole affair. He now questioned and cross-questioned Catherine, and seemed quite satisfied with the result.

'This would have made a fine case,' said he, 'if only it had been a question of the right of succession, for any lawyer to make out; but unfortunately the events are too long past to have any bearing upon the present.' (There Mr. Fleet was wrong, though we none of us knew it at the time.)

We now all launched forth into conjectures and opinions, during which Catherine lay still and weary upon the sofa. I saw this, and thought it quite time to put an end to the day's adventures by suggesting a retirement for the night, and we were soon all dispersed to dream of the mysterious vision and discovery.

I think we were none of us sorry when morning dawned without any further tragedy (by *us*, I mean the female part of the establishment).

When I came down to breakfast I found Mr. Fleet very active on the subject of the night before.

'A surgeon ought to be immediately sent for to pronounce an opinion on the contents of the chest,' he said; and Dr. Driscoll presently came, and after examining the bones minutely, decided that they were, as we thought, those of two females, who might have been from one to two hundred years dead.

Mr. Fleet next offered to decipher the will, for such he ima-

gined the parchment to be, and he and Mr. Fanshawe were closeted together for some time.

When they at last appeared again, they looked much interested and excited, and led me away to inform me of the result of their examination.

They told me that the document had proved to be a will, but that there was a circumstance connected with it which greatly added to the mystery of the whole business. This was the mention of the name of L'Estrange. I was, of course, as much surprised as they, and heard the will read with great interest.

I cannot remember the technical terms in which it was expressed. Mr. Fleet read me the translation he had made, for the original was in old English; but it was to this effect:

It purported to be the will of Reginald, Viscount St. Aubyn, in which he bequeathed all his inheritance to his lawful son Francis St. Aubyn—commonly known by the name of Francis l'Estrange—and to his heirs for ever. It was signed Reginald, Viscount St. Aubyn, and the witnesses were John Murray and Phoebe Brett, who in the old copy had each affixed their mark.

Mr. Fleet affirmed that it was a perfectly legal document, but this was not all it contained.

There was an appendix which our lawyer translated as follows:

'In order to avoid all disputes and doubts which might otherwise arise, I do hereby declare that my lawful wife was Editha, youngest daughter of Francis l'Estrange, Baronet, and that the register of our marriage may be seen in the church of St. Andrew, Haslet. By this marriage we had two children, a son Francis, and a daughter Catherine, commonly called Francis and Catherine l'Estrange. And

I hereby declare that Agatha Thornhaugh was not legally married to me as she imagined, my lawful wife being alive at the time; neither do I leave to her son by her first husband, Ralph Thornhaugh, any part or share in my inheritance.'

Both the will and the writing at the foot of it were dated the 14th of May 1668.

This accumulation of mysteries caused me for a time to feel quite bewildered and unable to think, but Mr. Fleet was in his element.

'Here is a case worth entering into,' said he, and he further went on to state that he had no doubt that the L'Estranges mentioned in the will were our Catherine's ancestors, the Christian names being similar rendering it more than probable. She was most likely a direct descendant of Francis l'Estrange, the heir mentioned in the will, who was no doubt also the fair-haired boy Catherine had seen in her vision.

The bones were those of his sister, the murdered Catherine l'Estrange, and of her murderess Agatha Thornhaugh, herself immured by her own son; but the matter ought not to rest on mere surmise, and the first place to go to for corroborating evidence was Craymoor church.

The rapidity with which Mr. Fleet came to his conclusions increased my bewilderment, and I was at a loss to know what evidence he expected to gain from Craymoor church. He reminded me, however, of Catherine's statement that 'the wicked woman' of her vision resembled the effigy on the monument there.

Thither, then, the lawyer repaired, accompanied by Mr. Fanshawe and George. It was thought best to keep the sequel of the story from Catherine and the others until it was explained more fully, as Mr. Fleet boldly affirmed it should be.

I awaited anxiously the result of their researches, and they exceeded I think even our good investigator's hopes.

Not only had they deciphered the inscription round the old monument, but with leave from the clergyman and the assistance of the sexton they had disinterred the coffin and found it to be filled with stones.

I am aware that this was rather an illegal proceeding, but as Mr. Fleet was only acting *en amateur* and not professionally, he did not stick at trifles.

The inscription was in Latin, and stated that the tomb was erected in memory of Agatha, wife of Reginald, Viscount St. Aubyn, who was buried beneath, and who died on the 31st day of December 1649—exactly two hundred years before the day on which Catherine had seen the vision.

I could not help thinking it shocking that the villagers had for two centuries been worshipping in the presence of a perpetual lie, but Mr. Fleet thought only of the grand corroboration of his 'case.' He applied to Mr. Fanshawe to take the next step, namely, to write to Catherine's aunt and only living relative, to tell her the whole story, and beg her to assist in elucidating matters by giving all the information she could respecting the L'Estrange family.

This was done, and we anxiously awaited the answer. Meantime, all my guests were clamorous to hear the contents of the will, and I had to appease them as best I could, by promising that they should know all soon.

In a few days, old Miss l'Estrange's answer came. She said her brother, father, and grandfather had all served in India, and that she believed her great-grandfather, who was a Francis l'Estrange, to have passed most of his life abroad,

there having been a cloud over his early youth. What this was, however, she could not say. She affirmed that the L'Estranges had in old times resided in —shire; and she further stated that her father's family had consisted of herself and her brother, whose only child Catherine was.

This was certainly not much information, but it was enough for our purpose. We no longer remained in doubt as to the truth of Mr. Fleet's version of the story, and when he himself told it to all our family-party one evening, everyone agreed that he had certainly succeeded in making out a very clever case.

As for Catherine, on being told that the figures she had beheld in the vision were thought to be those of her ancestors, she was not so much surprised as I expected, but said that she had had a presentiment all along that the tragedies she had witnessed were in some way connected with her own family.

I must not forget to say that on ascertaining that the parish church of Haslet was still standing, we searched the register, and another link of evidence was made clear by the finding of the looked-for entry.

There remains little more to be told. The charge of the old will was committed to Mr. Fleet, and Catherine's story has been carefully laid up among the archives of our family. I say advisedly of *our* family, for the line of the L'Estranges, alias St. Aubyns, has been united to ours by the marriage of Catherine to my son George, which took place in 1850.

I who write this am an old woman now, but I still live with my son and daughter-in-law.

George has bought Craymoor Grange, thus rendering justice after the lapse of two centuries, and re-



storing the inheritance of her fathers to the rightful owner.

I have but one more incident to relate, and I have done. A short time ago, old Miss l'Estrange died, bequeathing all her worldly possessions to Catherine. Amongst these were some old family relics. Catherine was looking over them as George unpacked them, and she presently came to a miniature of a young and beautiful girl with fair hair and blue eyes, and a wistful expression, and with it a necklace of pearls strung in a diamond pattern. On seeing these she became suddenly grave, and handing them to me, said: 'They are the same; the young girl, and the

pearl necklace I told you of.' No more was said at the time, for the children were present, and we had always avoided alluding to the horrible family tragedy before them; but if we had still retained any doubt about its truth—which we had not—this would have set it at rest.

If you were to visit Craymoor Grange now, you would find no old laundry. The part of the house containing it has been pulled down, and children play and chickens peck on the ground where it once stood.

The oaken chest has also long since been destroyed.

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## THE WEIRD OF THE WINDHAMS.

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### I.

OVER the bright boy's open palm  
The swarthy gipsy bent,  
The sunshine glinted through the boughs  
That spread above the tent  
On his waving hair and his fair frank face,  
And, wavering, glittering down,  
Danced on the sibyl's grizzled locks  
And mocked her mystic frown.

### II.

'There is fame for thee on land and sea,  
There is state and high command;  
I read of power, I read of wealth,  
In the lines of the fearless hand.  
I see the laurels of victory  
Fresh wreathed for the brow of the brave,  
The trampled lilies, the conquered flags,  
But through all I see the grave.

### III.

And thou shalt win a soldier's death,  
Yet fill a bloodless tomb,  
For not in the roaring battle's van  
Shalt thou meet the hour of doom.





THE WEIRD OF THE WINDHAMS.





The sword shall glance from thy crested head,  
The bullet shall pass thee by,  
No stain shall dim the azure scarf—  
Yet, soldier, thou must die.'

IV.

The careless laugh rang gaily out,  
The light step turned away,  
Yet the ominous words hung on his heart  
Like the cloud on a summer's day ;  
Fancies that fled from his lady's smile,  
As the mist from the west wind's breath.  
' And even if her words were sooth,  
What Windham shrinks from death ?'

\* \* \* \*

V.

The ancient Indian spell was said,  
The Indian rites were tried,  
Where the leader stood mid his warrior band  
In their joyous martial pride ;  
Ready to fight with any foe,  
To laugh at fear or sorrow.  
' We will have Fortune told to-night,  
And conquer her to-morrow !'

VI.

' There is the death-light in the eye,  
The death-pulse in the vein ;  
The conqueror's bays are woven for thee—  
Are woven, but all in vain.  
Untouched by shot, unharmed by sword,  
Beneath next evening's sky  
Thou shalt smile to hear the victor cheer,  
Yet, soldier, thou must die.'

VII.

' Again, again !' Sir Francis said ;  
' The tale is waxing old ;  
Thrice has this mystic doom of mine  
By prophet lips been told.  
I thank the Fates for my charmed life ;  
Our foemen front us well,  
And, by my faith, bold comrades mine,  
To-morrow shall prove the spell !'

VIII.

To-morrow came, with its deadly strife,  
The storm, the close, the fall ;  
The English cheer rang out at last  
Over the taken wall.  
The English flag flew fair and free  
Over the conquered town ;  
And still and calm on the glorious day  
The evening settled down.

*The Weird of the Windhams.*

## IX.

And where was he, the daring chief,  
 The hero of the day,—  
 The leader up the deadly breach,  
 The star of the tossing fray?  
 Should Windham's voice be silent now,  
 When the strife it cheered is won?  
 Should Windham's grave frank smile be missed  
 When his noble work is done?

## X.

They sought for him in a growing fear,  
 In a sudden nameless dread,  
 Through the swarming camp, through the taken town,  
 And, at last, among the dead.  
 They gazed in many a well-known face,  
 Where thickest lay the slain,  
 They bent o'er many a noble head,  
 But they looked for him in vain.

## XI.

At last they dragged the sunny lake,  
 Rush-edged and lily-leaved,  
 Where the blue, translucent, whispering waves  
 A dull red stain received.  
 And there, with a calm smile on his lips,  
 Unwounded from the fray,  
 Dead, in the glory of his prime,  
 Sir Francis Windham lay.

## XII.

O, Love's embrace is firm and close,  
 And strong is Friendship's clasp,  
 But sterner is the hold of hate,  
 And deadlier is his grasp!  
 The Indian brave met the English chief  
 On the lake's steep brink alone;  
 Sudden and stark the savage arms  
 Round the heedless soldier thrown.

## XIII.

Deadly and short the struggle there,  
 Sullen the plunge below,  
 As down to the hidden depths they sank,  
 Fierce foe embracing foe!  
 The Frenchman's savage ally wrought  
 More for his cause that night  
 Than ever his whole dark tribe had done  
 In many a bloody fight.

## XIV.

Far from his father's resting-place  
 The soldier's grave they made,  
 Where strange bright birds flit brilliantly  
 In the New World's forest shade.

But still the wandering Indians show  
The 'White Chief's' lonely tomb ;  
And still the Windhams tell the tale  
Of the gipsy's mystic doom.

XV.

O gallant heart, so early hushed,  
Bear witness from the past ;  
Shall Doubt his mocking, sneering haze  
On all fair legends cast ?  
Life has strange pages we must read ;  
Strange riddles none can guess :  
Listen to Windham's wondrous weird ;  
Pray more, and question less !

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*AN AMERICAN GHOST.*

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## PART I.

## A WEDDING.

'If you have spunk enough to take me up to the minister's and marry me to-night, you can have me. If not, you had better go home, and never come here again !'

The scene was the garden in front of a little, prim, white house in the town of Middleville, Connecticut. The time was twilight, on a quiet Sunday evening, in that beautiful period of the year known to Americans as the Indian summer. The speaker was Anne Hudson—a brunette, with bright black eyes, round rosy cheeks, and a trim, plump, graceful figure. She was addressing Mr. Ezekiel Hosmer, a tall, lank, awkward, short-sighted, bashful young farmer of the neighbourhood, who stood leaning on the garden-fence and looking down at her with his honest blue eyes. He was somewhat startled at the vehemence with which she spoke, but he was much more surprised at what she

said ; for everybody knew that Anne Hudson, the village beauty of Middleville, had a temper of her own. But the wonder to Ezekiel was how her temper, which had so often driven him away from her, should now become an ally to his suit, and obtain for him in a moment that consent to be his wife for which he had asked many, many times in vain.

Ezekiel had courted Anne ever since they were boy and girl at school together. In a worldly point of view the marriage would have been a very equal one. His father was a small farmer ; her father was a small shopkeeper. Neither of the parents had the slightest objection to the match. 'If you must marry somebody,' said old Mr. Hosmer to his son, 'Anne Hudson will suit me as a darter-in-law.' 'Zeke Hosmer is a smart, clever, steady sort of a man,' said old Mr. Hudson to his daughter ; 'and you'd better marry him and settle down.' The mothers were also agreed. They had known



each other from childhood, and were good friends and cronies still; and often, over a social dish of doughnuts, they had talked of the marriage of Zeke and Anne, and of what each would do towards giving the young couple an outfit, and of whom they should invite to the wedding and the house-warming, and of the name that should be bestowed upon their first grandchild. So far the course of true love ran smoothly enough. Of all the persons concerned only one had any obstacle to oppose.

But the mischief of the matter was that the true love was all on Ezekiel's side. The person who objected to the match was Anne Hudson herself. Anne had allowed him to come and sit with her; to accompany her to quilting-parties, apple-bees, corn-huskings, sewing-societies, and all the other amusements of an American country town. He was permitted to take her out sleigh-riding in the winter, and to escort her home from church in the summer. The whole town called him her beau, and in truth he was to all outward appearances an accepted suitor. But Ezekiel knew that the whole town was mistaken. Anne had never accepted him; on the contrary, she had repeatedly rejected him. Sometimes she said 'No!' pleasantly; sometimes angrily; sometimes regretfully; sometimes affectionately; but it was always 'No!' The utmost comfort she could give him was the promise that she would love him as a brother; but this comfort Ezekiel did not value much, having five sisters of his own already. So, when the young farmer had proposed and been rejected for the twentieth time, he could not help confessing to himself that his chances of success were desperate, although he was still determined to hope and to persevere.

And now, only two weeks after she had told him that she would never marry him, and that she wanted him for a brother, Anne Hudson had sent for him, met him at the garden-gate, and, without waiting for him to speak a word, asked him to make her his wife that very night. This sudden change, however, was not fickleness—it was Fate.

When chances become desperate, a desperate chance often wins. So it had been in this case. Ezekiel had won his bride because he was fortunate enough to have a rival. Mr. Richard Clapp, a drunken, dissolute fellow, but handsome, dashing, gallant, and with most fascinating and sympathetic manners, had fallen in love with Anne, and forced Anne to fall in love with him. If he could or would have married her she would have been his wife long ago; but Dick Clapp, a loafer by instinct and education, had no means of supporting a wife, although he was never quite out of money for his own livelihood. He had talent, but he hated industry. Even his love for Anne, even Anne's love for him, could not inspire him to go to work. No decent father would have given his daughter to such a suitor; no girl with the least common sense would have married him. Anne knew all this, but still she worshipped Dick Clapp. She had waited for three years hoping, praying, striving, coaxing, urging, and loving; but there was no change for the better. Dick would promise anything; he would do nothing. A thousand times, in the solitude of her neat, virgin chamber, Anne had resolved to give him up; a thousand times she had shuddered at tales of his wild excesses, and vowed that she would never see him again. Weak resolves and broken vows! Dick had but to take her in his arms

and all his offences were condoned or forgotten. The man had literally captivated her. She struggled to break her fetters when she was alone; but in his presence she was his slave. Her love for him was of course a secret from all but himself, and she rather encouraged Ezekiel's attentions in order to keep it secret; but its secrecy increased its strength. She would have blushed to hear her name linked with his; she heard him abused and condemned without being able to say a word in his defence; but she cherished her love all the more warmly, and she defended him with all the arts of feminine sophistry in her heart. A weak woman deeply in love with a man whom she knew to be bad—that is a plain statement of the relations at this time between Anne Hudson and Richard Clapp.

Ezekiel was ignorant of this relationship. He was unconscious that he had a rival. Anne had never seemed to prefer anybody else to him, even though she would not marry him. Now, by a strange stroke of fate, his unknown rival had thrown Anne into his arms. Stung almost to madness by the village gossip in regard to Dick Clapp's latest outrage against morality; wounded in her feminine pride at the thought that he had gone fresh from her bosom, and with her kisses yet warm and sweet upon his lips, to the embraces and the kisses of another woman; frightened at the reflection as to what would be her future with such a man; eager to punish him sorely, decisively, mortally; afraid to trust herself again to his blandishments lest she should be so weak as to forgive him; feeling that she must not, could not, would not love him, but that she did love him all the same—Anne Hudson had sought for some refuge from this storm of conflicting emotions,

and had chosen Ezekiel Hosmer as her ark. He loved her; he was a good man; he would save her from Dick Clapp; he would save her from herself. Married to him, she would never see her former lover; her heart would again be free; there would be no more torments, no more anxieties, no more struggles. Dick would be punished; he deserved it. She could never be anything more to him, however he might plead, however she might wish to yield. Ezekiel would be made happy, and he deserved it. He would protect her, and she would learn to love him. Everybody would be pleased, except the villain who had insulted her, and for him she now had no pity, and was eager to place herself in a position where she could never have any pity. So she sent at once for Ezekiel, who was only too glad to come, and made him that offer of herself which he was only too glad to accept.

Naturally Ezekiel hesitated and temporised a little when he had recovered from his amazement and discovered that Anne was in earnest. He suggested a week's delay—a day's delay. Would she not consult her father or her mother? Why was she in such a hurry? People would think they were mad, to get married so singularly. He must have time to tell his folks, or where could they go after they were wedded? She listened impatiently, answered hurriedly, but never wavered in her resolution that the marriage must be now or never. She felt that she could not trust herself till the next week or the next day; for Dick Clapp's whistle would summon her that night at ten, and she must go to him unless a husband's arms restrained her. As for what people might say, she did not care. As to her parents and his, they could be told afterwards. If Eze-

kiel had spunk enough to take her to the minister's now—this very moment—dressed as they were—without any more arguments or questions—she would go. If he would not take her thus, then she would never speak to him again.

When it came to this, Ezekiel could hesitate no longer. He had always loved her; and if, after many refusals, she now desired to become his wife rather suddenly and in a singularly un-Middleville manner, the suddenness was a blessing and the singularity was her own affair. He leaned across the fence and kissed her, opened the gate, drew her arm through his, and walked quietly up to the minister's house. In Connecticut no bans, no licenses, no wedding-rings even, are necessary. The clergyman was well pleased to earn an unexpected fee, and had nothing whatever to say against a match which the whole village approved. In ten minutes the simple ceremony was over, and in an hour afterward Mr. and Mrs. Hosmer were receiving the congratulations of their friends.

When Dick Clapp sounded his whistle near the Hudson homestead, at ten o'clock that night, there was no response.

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## PART II.

### A MURDER.

WITHIN two years from the date of their sudden marriage, Ezekiel Hosmer and his wife emigrated to the far West, and settled upon a tract of land in the woods of Wisconsin. They had left Middleville with but few regrets. Ezekiel hoped to better his fortunes in a new country, as many of his neighbours and friends had done before him; and Anne was quite ready to put as many miles as possible

between herself and Dick Clapp. Ezekiel's father had died; and the property, which was sufficient for the whole Hosmer family while he lived and managed it and kept it together, gave to each of the heirs a very small sum of money when it came to be divided according to the will. Ezekiel took his portion, and bethought himself what he should do with it. There was not enough money to buy a good farm in Middleville, nor, indeed, in any of the Eastern States; but in the West, where government land could be purchased for six dollars an acre, or had for nothing by simply clearing it, his money and his labour would make him independent. It was a simple problem of ways and means, and many other young American farmers had solved it successfully in Ezekiel's time. He thought of their success, and determined to emigrate if his wife did not refuse. He found her very glad to go. The work, he told her, would be very rough at first; their home a log-cabin, their fare meagre, their society that of each other. She answered that she was not afraid of rough work; she would like to dwell in a log-cabin; she could live anyhow; she cared nothing for society. After a few busy months of purchases and preparations, they had emigrated. The second anniversary of their wedding was passed on the banks of a little river, in the depths of a primeval forest. Ezekiel's own hands had raised the roof that covered them; his rifle had shot the game which his wife had cooked for dinner. They had been in the woods nearly six months, and were quite comfortable and quite alone. Dinner was over, and the husband and wife sat before the fire of blazing logs. He smoked his pipe peacefully, and, wearied with the work of to-day, planned the labours of to-morrow. She sewed and looked



into the fire, and thought of the past and the future.

The central figure in Mrs. Hosmer's musings was Dick Clapp. She very often thought of him. Now that she was so far away from Middleville she felt that she could think of him with safety. Her married life had been by no means happy. She had wedded Ezekiel not only in haste, but from pique, and such a wedding could hardly result in happiness. As she looked at her husband, sitting opposite, she knew that, even yet, he was no more to her than a brother. She had never dared to tell him why she had changed her mind about him so strangely on the Sunday they were married; and this secret lay perpetually between them. Her confession, at first postponed from time to time, became impossible as the months went by and she discovered how uncongenial her husband was to her. Ezekiel was contented enough, treated her with the utmost kindness, loved his home, was proud of his wife, and only regretted that they had been blessed with no children. Anne often regretted it too. She thought that in a child she might find refuge from Ezekiel, as she had once found refuge in Ezekiel from Richard Clapp. She was not satisfied: she wanted something, and would not own to herself that it was her old lover. Her nature, a hundredfold more passionate than that of her husband, resented his placidity, his steadiness, his happiness. He was a good, kind, gentle man; but often she told herself that his goodness was dulness, his kindness indifference, and his gentleness mawkish. Deep, wild, ancestral passions lie hidden in many of the people of the Puritan States, and burst forth with all the greater violence because they have been controlled for generations. Anne

Hudson felt such passions surging in her bosom; but she did not yet know what they meant. In one of her dark moods she had said to herself, 'Dick Clapp, with all his vices, was at least a man!' Seen through the haze of her love, his very errors seemed manly—his excesses manly, his crimes manly, compared with the smooth, quiet current of her husband's life. His face, his figure, his quick agile movements—ah! these seemed more than manly as she pictured them in the fire. She had never seen Dick Clapp and her husband together. Of course Ezekiel had known Dick Clapp, but only as one young fellow in such a town as Middleville knows another whose tastes and habits are very different. They had met at the tavern, had taken a drink in company, had wagered with each other upon the presidential elections; but Dick thought Ezekiel too slow, and Ezekiel thought Dick too fast; and so they seldom associated. She had never seen them together; but now she photographed them, side by side, in the burning coals. What a contrast! Her heart beat more rapidly as she thought that in every point Dick looked the superior of her husband. She had only seen him once since her marriage, and then his conduct had been very different from that which she had expected. He had called one day, so soon as the news of the wedding was town-talk, and asked to see Mrs. Hosmer. Her husband was out at work; but, being a wife, she imagined herself strong enough to face a hundred lovers. Her strength was put to no great test. The interview was very brief. Dick did not offer to shake hands with her, but, eyeing her sternly from head to foot, said very abruptly:

'I can't congratulate you. You have acted like a fool. I know why you married Zeke Hosmer,

and I know whom you love as well as ever. I'll never give you up, Anne Hudson. I'll have you yet—remember that.' And so, without another word, he strode away.

What had he meant by saying that he would never give her up? What had he meant by saying he would have her yet? Nothing. The words had come to nothing. He had not quarrelled with Ezekiel, nor pestered her with letters, nor sued her for breach of promise, nor molested her in any mode. She recalled the whole scene, she remembered every syllable he had said, and her lip curled scornfully as she thought that all his promises had proven as flimsy as his threats. As this occurred to her mind, the indignation she had felt against him on her wedding-day returned in full force. With her indignation came back also that other feeling—that Ezekiel was her ark of refuge. She looked intently at him as he sat smoking and thinking, and every now and then dropping into a light doze, as ignorant of the tempest in his wife's heart as if he had never seen a woman. She felt constrained to go to him, as she had gone on that memorable Sunday, and ask him for safety from herself. She knew that he would take her, like a child, in his great, strong arms, and then—she shuddered. But, still reasoning with herself, she declared that it would be best to tell him all the story of Dick Clapp; and by talking about it, cure herself of thinking about it. She knew that he would listen kindly, and try to comfort her; and deem it no slight to himself that she had once loved another. Perhaps that would end her trouble. At any rate, it would be grateful to her to put her thoughts into words. Now, on her wedding anniversary, was the fittest time,

and she would speak. She turned to address her husband, and as she did so she heard a quick knock at the door. The door opened, and there—by one of those coincidences which are so common in real life that they have passed into a proverb—she saw the very man of whom she had been thinking the whole evening!

At first she thought that Dick Clapp was his own ghost, and she screamed. Another moment reassured her, and she sank back in her chair, half-fainting. Ezekiel was already shaking hands with his visitor, whom he, in spite of his weak sight, had recognised at once. He was very glad to see Dick; he would have been very glad to see anybody from Middleville. Dick was cold and wet; so a seat was found for him near the fire, and one of Ezekiel's coats was pulled upon his broader shoulders. Dick was hungry; so cold meat and bread were placed upon the table. After a hearty supper, Dick would smoke; so Ezekiel cheerfully handed over his favourite pipe. The frontiersman could not do too much for Dick, who had come from Middleville. All the while questions about the old town, and the old people, and the old places, were being rapidly asked and answered; and Mrs. Hosmer, taking little part in the conversation, had plenty of time to recover her composure. Dick scarcely spoke to her. Ezekiel engrossed all his attention. Presently, during a short pause, while the pipes were being lighted, Ezekiel remembered that he had not asked how Dick came to find him out. Then everything was explained. Dick Clapp, it appeared, had resolved not to idle about Middleville any longer, but to try his luck in the West, like other men. He had got together a few hundred dollars, bought some tools, and started for the address

which Ezekiel's mother had given him. There he learned where Ezekiel's clearing was, and had tramped across country to hunt him up. Ezekiel was delighted, and asked what Dick proposed to do. Well, there seemed to be plenty of room and plenty of work, and Dick proposed to buy a hundred acres somewhere in the vicinity, take off his coat,—“or your coat,” he laughingly interpolated,—swing his axe, and make his fortune. Ezekiel was still more delighted. But had Dick any objections to settle down here, work on shares, and live in the cabin? Another pair of hands were needed; two men working together could do more than four working separately; Ezekiel had just thought of hiring another man to help him: these and a hundred other unanswerable arguments were advanced. Dick had no objections, needed no arguments, and was only too much obliged for so good an offer. So the bargain was struck; and then Mrs. Hosmer went to bed, her advice not having been asked by her husband, and her presence having, in fact, been almost forgotten. The two men sat up until morning, discussing the details of their partnership and their plans for making money.

The partnership prospered. Day by day the Hosmer clearing extended. Working side by side, the men vied with each other in their labours. The chopping of their axes seemed incessant. At night, sitting close together over the fire, they talked, and schemed, and heaped up future riches. Ezekiel had become more fond of Dick than of any other being in the world, except Anne. Dick apparently reciprocated his friendship quite as warmly. But in two hearts there was a Hades. Dick had not been in the cabin a week before he had reacquired his old ascendancy over Mrs. Hosmer. She

now saw him beside her husband, as she had seen him in the fire, and she again worshipped him. Dick saw this; he could not help seeing it; but Ezekiel saw nothing. For nearly a month Anne and her former lover had no opportunity of exchanging more than a few broken words in private; but he managed to hint, rather than tell her, that she was still his, and that he had come all these weary miles for her alone. There was nothing definite said, nothing that she could check, nothing that she could repeat to her husband without telling him the whole long story; and if she did that, he could now justly turn upon her, and ask why she had allowed her old lover to come into his house—why she had not told him in time to warn him against such a partnership. Dick knew the advantage he had gained, and used it artfully. Hour by hour the devilish game went on. Bit by bit Anne learned of the tortures Dick suffered from seeing her another man's wife; of his sleepless nights; of the hate he bore her husband; of his insatiable, unconquerable love for herself. She did not rebuke him. Before he ventured to say so much, he felt that he was beyond the danger of rebuke. Ezekiel was inseparable from him, but there were always moments to be snatched for a word to Anne, and then, after a few tedious weeks, for a kiss. Ezekiel was still unsuspecting; but when the first guilty kiss had been given and received, that drama of the passions in which he unconsciously played so important a part soon reached its sensation scene.

Three months from the date of Dick's arrival at the clearing, Ezekiel started, in accordance with previous business arrangements, for a village about twenty miles distant, where he intended to dis-

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pose of his wood and purchase household necessities. Several times before he had made such journeys, but never without the companionship of his wife or his partner. They would have preferred to stay at home together; but when he asked one or the other to go, on the plea of giving Mrs. Hosmer a ride or Dick a holiday, they were afraid to refuse. Guilt made them suspicious, and they thought that Ezekiel suspected them. On this occasion, however, Satan favoured the lovers. There was important work to be completed at home, and so Dick must remain. The roads were unusually bad, and there seemed to be a storm in the air, and so Mrs. Hosmer could not go. Afraid of herself, of Dick, of she knew not what, Anne repeatedly urged Ezekiel to take his partner. It was impossible; certain chores must be done. So Ezekiel rode off alone, and before he was out of hearing Dick entered the house. His purpose was plain; his victory easy. In truth, Mrs. Hosmer was conquered already. She loved him, she loved him madly; she loved him in spite of honour, duty, and marriage-vows; she loved him in spite of herself. They were lovers, and they gave themselves up to love. Suddenly, in the midst of their protestations, they were startled by the sound of horse's feet. Ezekiel had returned. An awful fear paralysed them both. What if he knew? Why had he come back? Ezekiel knew nothing wrong; he had returned because the roads were much worse than he had expected, owing to the recent rains, and because a bridge over a creek had been carried away. These reasons were natural enough; and if Dick had only stopped to think—But he could not think; he was dazed; his blood was on fire; his brain was in a whirl. The triple

devil in the man was fully roused; his eyes glared with lust, and fear, and hate. Stepping out of the door, he took up his axe, and advanced towards his partner, who was stooping to examine one of the horse's hoofs. As Ezekiel rose he saw the murder in Dick's face, and started back; but it was too late. Down came the axe, and Ezekiel Hosmer was a corpse. Without a word, Dick pulled the body across the road, dug a shallow grave, pushed the dead man in, threw the bloody axe upon him, and shovelled back the earth. Without a word he walked into the cabin, seated himself in Ezekiel's arm-chair before the fire, and pressed Ezekiel's wife to his heart.

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### PART III.

#### THE GHOST.

IN every new country the changes of ten years are wonderful. Cities spring up like magic, and wildernesses of woods are transformed into brick and stone. Such a transformation happened to that part of Wisconsin where Ezekiel Hosmer had fixed his unhappy home. Six months after his murder the place was deserted, and his old cabin had fallen into decay. A year after, five cabins stood near Hosmer's clearing. In two years more there was a village of cabins. At the end of ten years a thriving, bustling town succeeded the village, and prided itself upon its enterprise. The forest had gradually withdrawn out of sight. The little river had grown important, and been honoured with a name, a president's name—the name of Tyler—bestowed upon it as a joke because it was so small. The town, too, had a name. It was called Hoston. In the first syllable of this word lived almost the only memento of poor Ezekiel; for



Hoston was a contraction of Hostmertown, the village having been thus christened to immortalise the first settler. But, greatest fact of all, the town had also a railroad, and was destined to become a railway junction, and consequently a city. Express trains went roaring through Hoston, and added to its bustle. Freight trains stopped there, and increased its wealth. Passenger trains halted ten minutes for refreshments, and augmented its business. The International Hotel at Hoston had been made famous by its proprietors and their friends, the newspaper correspondents, as the best place on the Great Western route for luxurious travellers to break their journey, and avoid the fatigues of another night on the road. Many travellers believed this, paid dearly for their credulity, and gave the streets of Hoston quite a fashionable appearance on fine evenings. All the world conceded that Hoston had a brilliant future, and the price of building-lots was consequently very high.

Perhaps for this reason there were many vacant pieces of ground in Hoston, some fenced-in, some open to the schoolboys and other public characters. Among the open lots were several which lay almost in the centre of the town, between the principal street and the river. The owner held them at a very large figure, and had managed the matter so admirably that he was likely to get his price. He could probably have sold them one by one for building purposes, in course of time, had he pleased; for they were certainly 'very eligibly situated, fronting on Washington-street, the Broadway of Hoston, and commanding most beautiful and extensive views of the Tyler River and its celebrated scenery,' as he stated in his prospectus. But Mr. Oakley, the proprietor of this

valuable real estate, had other plans. He knew that a corporation is more liberal than any individual member of that corporation; and therefore he decided not to sell his lots to any citizen of Hoston, but to Hoston in the aggregate. He argued that the city of Hoston must have a park, in order to rank with other cities, like New York, London, Paris. He could prove to you that no piece of land in the vicinity was so capitably located for a park as the piece of land which he owned; and this was undeniably true. He appealed to your historical conscience, by showing you, upon the maps which hung about his office, that the first settler in that district had built his cabin upon the very plot of ground now destined for a park; and, in moments of sentiment, he would grandiloquently refer to it as 'sacred soil.' Shrewdest of all, he anticipated events by throwing the lots open to the public, and placing a few iron seats here and there, hoping that when the people had grown accustomed to the pleasure of promenading in the park, they would not submit to be shut out of it by buildings, and would thus compel the corporation to pay him his own price. It certainly was a very pleasant resort; everybody in Hoston frequented it; the seats were always filled in sunshiny weather, and especially at eventide, when lovers were abroad; and Mr. Oakley's plans prospered accordingly.

The greatest feature of the park, however, was the Ghost's Walk, so called by some local reader of Dickens's novels. Every now and then, but at long intervals, some of the visitors to the park were fortunate enough to see the Ghost. It was described as a tall, thin, shambling figure, roughly but comfortably dressed, and carrying in its right hand a backwoodsman's axe. It appeared suddenly as the visitor

was crossing the park, walked noiselessly beside him, as if trying to read his countenance, stopped at a certain point, turned quickly so as to disclose a deep, bloody gash upon the side of its head and face, and then vanished in an instant. Sometimes this figure would be visible to those by whose side it walked, and to nobody else. Sometimes other persons would see it, and he whom it accompanied would be entirely unconscious of its presence. Sometimes all the people in the park would behold it, and point it out to each other wonderingly. On account of these varying phenomena, some wise men contended that there was no Ghost in Hoston, but that the figure existed only in the imagination of the ignorant. Among these disbelievers was Mr. Oakley, who had not been deaf to the ill-natured reports that he intended to reserve his land for a park because no sensible citizens would build there, for fear lest the Ghost should use its phantom axe upon them in the dead of night, as a punishment for trespassing upon its domain. But in spite of Mr. Oakley, who ought to have known whether he owned a Ghost or not, the majority of the people believed in the apparition, and were rather proud of it: no other town in Wisconsin had a Ghost. In this, as in everything else, Hoston was ahead of all competition. Besides, it was a harmless Ghost; it never injured anybody, never spoke to anybody, and seemed so much like a real man, that until it turned its bloody face to the observer, there was nothing about it to shake the weakest nerves. Thus, that path which the Ghost always used came in time to be called the Ghost's Walk, and Mr. Oakley has still retained the name in his park, having found, as the story became known, that the romance of the thing was an additional charm. 'I

valued that there Ghost,' he said confidentially to his friends, 'at *two* thousand five hundred dollars; and the corporation paid the extra money, gentlemen. Ah! Ha, ha, ha!'

One evening a party of ten or twelve passengers got out of the through train at Hoston to rest comfortably for the night, intending to resume their journey the next morning. They went to the International Hotel, ordered rooms, and registered their names. First on the register, in bold strong characters, was the entry: 'Mr. and Mrs. Richard Clapp, of Philadelphia;'; and these names attracted very great attention afterwards. Mr. and Mrs. Clapp were evidently wealthy, middle-aged persons: the lady an invalid, very nervous, but with some faint traces of former beauty; the gentleman portly, arrogant, dictatorial, and proud of his person and his fortune. None of the party had ever been in Hoston before; but Mr. Clapp took control of all their arrangements as if he owned his travelling-companions, the hotel, the town, and the circumjacent country. The proprietors paid him special attention, believing from his manner, or from some questions he had asked, that he was a large shareholder in the recently-projected railroad from Hoston to San Francisco. He selected the dinner for the company, commanded the waiters to ice the International-Hotel brand of champagne, and impressed everybody with his supreme importance. The cooks trembled at the directions he sent down to them, and exhausted themselves and their art in preparing the dishes he preferred. The steward, conscience-stricken at his own knowledge of the quality of the hotel-wines, slipped off to Mr. Oakley's house, and borrowed a few bottles of genuine Heidsieck for the coming feast. On

the whole, the dinner was capital ; and Mr. Clapp, having monopolised the credit thereof, and the conversation thereat, generously proposed to pay the entire bill—a proposition which was at once decidedly accepted by a meek little man, who afterwards turned out to be the real stockholder in the projected railroad, but which was as decidedly refused by the majority of the party, who were all mere travelling acquaintances. After dinner, the ladies went up to the parlour, and the gentlemen smoked their cigars, played billiards, or read the papers. Presently Mr. Clapp suggested a stroll, and one of the other gentlemen insisted that they should take the ladies. Agreed. The ladies would be delighted to go. Mrs. Clapp, however, complained of a slight headache, and desired to retire to rest ; but her husband instantly pooh-poohed her complaint, and she appeared equipped for the walk.

‘Is there anything to see in this town?’ asked Mr. Clapp as they stood on the hotel-porch.

‘Yes,’ replied the prompt hotel-clerk, ‘there’s the park.’

‘And the Ghost!’ almost whispered an obsequious waiter, prompting the clerk.

Mr. Clapp turned fiercely upon him. ‘Hold your tongue!’ he hissed angrily. ‘If my wife hears you—’ and he touched the pocket which contained his revolver to emphasise the threat.

‘A park!’ cried one of the ladies. ‘Delicious! Why, we shall all be like married lovers!’

‘Turn to the left and keep right on,’ said the hotel-clerk, pointing out their route.

They started off, all laughing and talking together ; but before they had proceeded many yards Mr. Clapp halted, and called out loudly, in a voice thick and hoarse with his recent passion,

‘Some of you go on the other side of the street. We look like a funeral, walking two and two this way.’

It was a splendid evening. The moonlight, seeming to make everything as bright as day with its deceptive radiance, really increased the beauties and concealed the defects of the scenery. When the party from the hotel, broken up by Mr. Clapp’s prejudice against their funereal procession, entered the park in separate couples, they found many Hostonians enjoying the fresh air and the serene night. There was, however, a vacant seat beyond the Ghost’s Walk, and Mr. Clapp, perceiving it, slowly conducted his wife in that direction. Instantly a silence of interest and expectation, so intense as to be absolutely painful, seized upon all the Hostonians who believed in the story of the Ghost ; and the strangers, infected by the sudden stillness, stood and looked about inquiringly. Mr. and Mrs. Clapp moved onward, unconscious of the general gaze. A few seconds, which seemed hours to the intent observers, and they stepped upon the mysterious path. Quick as thought, the Ghost rose beside them, and kept pace with them, and peered curiously into their faces. Every person saw it—strangers as well as townsfolk—except the haunted couple. There it was—a tall, lank, awkward figure, dressed in rough frontier clothes, its face pale and wan in the moonlight, and in its hand the phantom axe. It was as plain and real to all the people, except the man and woman into whose faces it tried to look, as if it had been a living being. Suddenly it seemed to recognise them, and stood erect, exposing its gashed cheek to view. The woman turned, stared at the figure, screamed ‘Good God! my husband!’ and fell senseless to the

earth. The man started in alarm at her fall, and as he faced the Ghost the people saw it raise its gleaming axe. With a sharp oath, Mr. Clapp drew his revolver, aimed and fired; but through the smoke, and distinct as the report of the pistol, the spell-bound observers saw the swift flash and heard the dull thud of the Ghost's deadlier weapon. When, with inarticulate groans and cries, the crowd rushed to the spot, Mr. Richard Clapp lay stone-dead, his face horribly cut with a gash like that upon the face of the Ghost. The woman whom he called his wife had lost her reason for ever.

But still Mr. Oakley does not believe these facts now that he has sold the park. 'See here,' he will say to anyone who will listen; 'I can explode that story quicker'n lightning. Yes. I went to the place

next day, rummaged about, and what d'ye think I found? Why, an axe-head, buried in the ground, edge uppermost, and *projecting* above the surface. Well. Under that axe was a skeleton. Original settler buried there, I s'pose, with his axe, Injin fashion. If so, *increases* the value of the property, don't it? Well. Clapp—big, heavy man—tripped over something, fell on that axe and split his head. Killed him dead. Revolver went off with the shock. Yes. Woman screamed "My husband!" (meaning Clapp,) and got scared crazy. Natural, too, poor thing! Gentlemen, that axe was the real Ghost. None been seen *in* Hoston since I dug that axe up, has there? Well. I split my firewood with that Ghost, so to speak, and it never gits back on *me*. Ah! Ha, ha, ha! Gentlemen, name your drinks.'

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## HAUNTED.

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[Concerning the following story, all I can say is, that it was told to me as authentic by a clergyman of Virginia: that a display of incredulity on my part elicited a determination on his to hunt up his informant, and obtain further and more minute details as to the precise time and place of the events narrated; but that soon afterwards the civil war, which separated friends and foes alike, separated me from my clerical authority, and I never could learn any more about the incredible story. Committed now to paper, it may be read like hundreds of similar stories—simply to amuse and be forgotten; or should it meet the eye of those who love investigation, there is now no blockade between here and there to check inquiry.]

SOME few years ago one of those great national conventions which draw together all ages and conditions of the sovereign people of America was held in Charleston, South Carolina.

Colonel Demarion, one of the

State Representatives, had attended that great national convention; and, after an exciting week, was returning home, having a long and difficult journey before him.

A pair of magnificent horses, attached to a light buggy, flew mer-



rily enough over a rough country for a while ; but towards evening stormy weather reduced the roads to a dangerous condition, and compelled the Colonel to relinquish his purpose of reaching home that night, and to stop at a small wayside tavern, whose interior, illuminated by blazing wood-fires, spread a glowing halo among the dripping trees as he approached it, and gave promise of warmth and shelter at least.

Drawing up to this modest dwelling, Colonel Demarion saw through its uncurtained windows that there was no lack of company within. Beneath the trees, too, an entanglement of rustic vehicles, giving forth red gleams from every dripping angle, told him that beasts as well as men were cared for. At the open door appeared the form of a man, who, at the sound of wheels, but not seeing in the outside darkness whom he addressed, called out, 'Tain't no earthly use a-stoppin' here.'

Caring more for his chattels than for himself, the Colonel paid no further regard to this address than to call loudly for the landlord.

At the tone of authority, the man in outline more civilly announced himself to be the host ; yet so far from inviting the traveller to alight, insisted that the house was 'as full as it could pack ;' but that there was a place a little farther down the road where the gentleman would be certain to find excellent accommodation.

'What stables have you here?' demanded the traveller, giving no more heed to this than to the former announcement ; but bidding his servant to alight, and preparing to do so himself.

'Stables!' repeated the baffled host, shading his eyes so as to scrutinise the new-comer, 'stables, Cap'n'

'Yes, stables. I want you to take

care of my horses ; I can take care of myself. Some shelter for cattle you must have by the look of these traps,' pointing to the wagons. 'I don't want my horses to be kept standing out in this storm, you know.'

'No, Major. Why no, certn'y ; Marions ain't over a mile, and—'

'Conf—!' muttered the Colonel ; 'but it's over the river, which I don't intend to ford to-night under any consideration.'

So saying, the Colonel leaped to the ground, directing his servant to cover the horses and then get out his valise ; while the host, thus defeated, assumed the best grace he could to say that he would see what could be done 'for the horses.'

'I am a soldier, my man,' added the Colonel in a milder tone, as he stamped his cold feet on the porch and shook off the rain from his travelling-gear ; 'I am used to rough fare and a hard couch : all we want is shelter. A corner of the floor will suffice for me and my rug ; a private room I can dispense with at such times as these.'

The landlord seemed no less relieved at this assurance than mollified by the explanation of a traveller whom he now saw was of a very different stamp from those who usually frequented the tavern. 'For the matter of stables, his were newly put up, and first-rate,' he said ; and 'cert'n'y the Gen'ral was welcome to a seat by the fire while 'twas a-storming so fierce.'

Colonel Demarion gave orders to his servant regarding the horses, while the landlord, kicking at what seemed to be a bundle of sacking down behind the door, shouted—'Jo ! Ho, Jo ! Wake up, you sleepy-headed nigger ! Be alive, boy, and show this gentleman's horses to the stables.' Upon a repetition of which charges a tall, gaunt, dusky figure lifted itself from out of the dark corner, and grew

taller and more gaunt as it stretched itself into waking with a grin which was the most visible part of it, by reason of two long rows of ivory gleaming in the red glare. The hard words had fallen as harmless on Jo's ear-drum as the kicks upon his impassive frame. To do Jo's master justice, the kicks were not vicious kicks, and the rough language was but an intimation that despatch was needed. Very much of the spaniel's nature had Jo; and as he rolled along the passage to fetch a lantern, his mouth expanded into a still broader grin at the honour of attending so stately a gentleman. Quick, like his master, too, was Jo to discriminate between 'real gentlefolks' and the 'white trash' whose rough-coated, rope-harnessed mules were the general occupants of his stables.

'Splendid pair, sir,' said the now conciliating landlord. 'Shove some o' them mules out into the shed, Jo (which your horses 'll feel more to hum in my new stalls, Gen'ral').

Again cautioning his man Plato not to leave them one moment, Colonel Demarion turned to enter the house.

'You'll find a rough crowd in here, sir,' said the host, as he paused on the threshold; 'but a good fire, anyhow. 'Tain't many of these loafers as understands this convention business—I *presume*, Gen'ral, you've attended the convention—they all on em *thinks* they does, tho'. Fact most on 'em thinks they'd orter be on the committee theirselves. Good many on 'em is from Char'ston to-day, but is in the same fix as yerself, Gen'ral—can't get across the river to-night.'

'I see, I see,' cried the statesman, with a gesture towards the sitting-room. 'Now what have you got in your larder, Mr. Landlord? and send some supper out to my servant; he must make a bed of the carriage-mats to-night.'

The landlord introduced his guest into a room filled chiefly with that shiftless and noxious element of Southern society known as 'mean whites.' Pipes and drinks, and excited arguments, engaged these people as they stood or sat in groups. The host addressed those who were gathered round the log-fire, and they opened a way for the new-comer, some few, with republican freedom, inviting him to be seated, the rest giving one furtive glance, and then, in antipathy born of envy, skulking away.

The furniture of this comfortless apartment consisted of sloppy, much-jagged deal tables, dirty whittled benches, and a few uncouth chairs. The walls were dingy with accumulated tobacco-stains, and so moist and filthy was the floor, that the sound only of scraping seats and heavy footsteps told that it was of boards and not bare earth.

Seated with his back towards the majority of the crowd, and shielded by his newspaper, Colonel Demarion sat awhile unobserved; but was presently recognised by a man from his own immediate neighbourhood, when the information was quickly whispered about that no less a person than their distinguished congressman was among them.

This piece of news speedily found its way to the ears of the landlord, to whom Colonel Demarion was known by name only, and forthwith he reappeared to overwhelm the representative of his State with apologies for the uncourteous reception which had been given him, and to express his now very sincere regrets that the house offered no suitable accommodation for the gentleman. Satisfied as to the safety of his chattels, the Colonel generously dismissed the idea of having anything either to resent or to forgive; and assured the worthy

host that he would accept of no exclusive indulgences.

In spite of which the landlord bustled about to bring in a separate table, on which he spread a clean coarse cloth, and a savoury supper of broiled ham, hot corn-cakes, and coffee; every few minutes stopping to renew his apologies, and even appearing to grow confidentially communicative regarding his domestic economies; until the hungry traveller cut him short with 'Don't say another word about it, my friend; you have not a spare sleeping-room, and that is enough. Find me a corner—a clean corner—' looking round upon the most unclean corners of that room—'perhaps upstairs somewhere, and—'

'Ah! *upsta'rs*, Gen'ral. Now, that's jest what I had in my mind to ax you. Fact is, ther' *is* a spar' room upsta'rs, as comfortable a room as the best of folks can wish; but—'

'But it's crammed with sleeping folks, so there's an end of it,' cried the senator, thoroughly bored.

'No, sir, ain't no person in it; and ther' ain't no person likely to be in it 'cept 'tis *yerself*, Colonel Demarion. Leastways—'

After a good deal of hesitation and embarrassment, the host, in mysterious whispers, imparted the startling fact that this most desirable sleeping-room was *haunted*; that the injury he had sustained in consequence had compelled him to fasten it up altogether; that he had come to be very suspicious of admitting strangers, and had limited his custom of late to what the bar could supply, keeping the matter hushed up in the hope that it might be the sooner forgotten by the neighbours; but that in the case of Colonel Demarion he had now made bold to mention it; 'as I can't but think, sir,' he urged, 'you'd find it prefer'ble to sleepin'

on the floor or sittin' up all night along ov these loafers. Fer if 'tis any deceivin' trick got up in the house, maybe they won't try it on, sir, to a gentleman of your reputation.'

Colonel Demarion became interested in the landlord's confidences, but could only gather in further explanation that for some time past all travellers who had occupied that room had 'made off in the middle of the night, never showin' their faces at the inn again;' that on endeavouring to arrest one or more in their nocturnal flight, they—all more or less terrified—had insisted on escaping without a moment's delay, assigning no other reason than that they had seen a ghost. 'Not that folks seem to get much harm by it, Colonel—not by the way they makes off without paying a cent of money!'

Great indeed was the satisfaction evinced by the victim of unpaid bills on the Colonel's declaring that the haunted chamber was the very room for him. 'If to be turned out of my bed at midnight is all I have to fear, we will see who comes off master in my case. So, Mr. Landlord, let the chamber be got ready directly, and have a good fire built there at once.'

The exultant host hurried away to confide the great news to Jo, and with him to make the necessary preparations. 'Come what will, Jo, Colonel Demarion ain't the man to make off without paying down good money for his accommodations.'

In reasonable time, Colonel Demarion was beckoned out of the public room, and conducted upstairs by the landlord, who, after receiving a cheerful 'good-night,' paused on the landing to hear his guest bolt and bar the door within, and then push a piece of furniture against it. 'Ah,' murmured the



host, as a sort of misgiving came over him, 'if a apparishum has a mind to come thar, 'tain't all the bolts and bars in South Carlina as 'll kip'en away.'

But the Colonel's precaution of securing his door, as also that of placing his revolvers in readiness, had not the slightest reference to the reputed ghost. Spiritual disturbances of such kind he feared not. Spirits *tangible* were already producing ominous demonstrations in the rooms below, nor was it possible to conjecture what troubles these might evolve. Glad enough to escape from the noisy company, he took a survey of his evil-reputed chamber. The only light was that of the roaring, crackling, blazing wood-fire, and no other was needed. And what storm-benighted traveller, when fierce winds and rains are lashing around his lodging, can withstand the cheering influences of a glorious log-fire? especially if, as in that wooden tenement, that fire be of abundant pine-knots. It rivals the glare of gas and the glow of a furnace; it charms away the mustiness and fustiness of years, and causes all that is dull and dead around to laugh and dance in its bright light.

By the illumination of just such a fire, Colonel Demarion observed that the apartment offered nothing worthier of remark than that the furniture was superior to anything that might be expected in a small wayside tavern. In truth, the landlord had expended a considerable sum in fitting up this, his finest chamber, and had therefore sufficient reason to bemoan its unprofitableness.

Having satisfied himself as to his apparent security, the senator thought no more of spirits palpable or impalpable; but to the far graver issues of the convention his thoughts reverted. It was yet

early; he lighted a cigar, and in full appreciation of his retirement, took out his note-book and plunged into the affairs of state. Now and then he was recalled to the circumstances of his situation by the swaggering tread of unsteady feet about the house, or when the boisterous shouts below raged above the outside storm; but even then he only glanced up from his papers to congratulate himself upon his agreeable seclusion.

Thus he sat for above an hour, then he heaped fresh logs upon the hearth, looked again to his revolvers, and retired to rest.

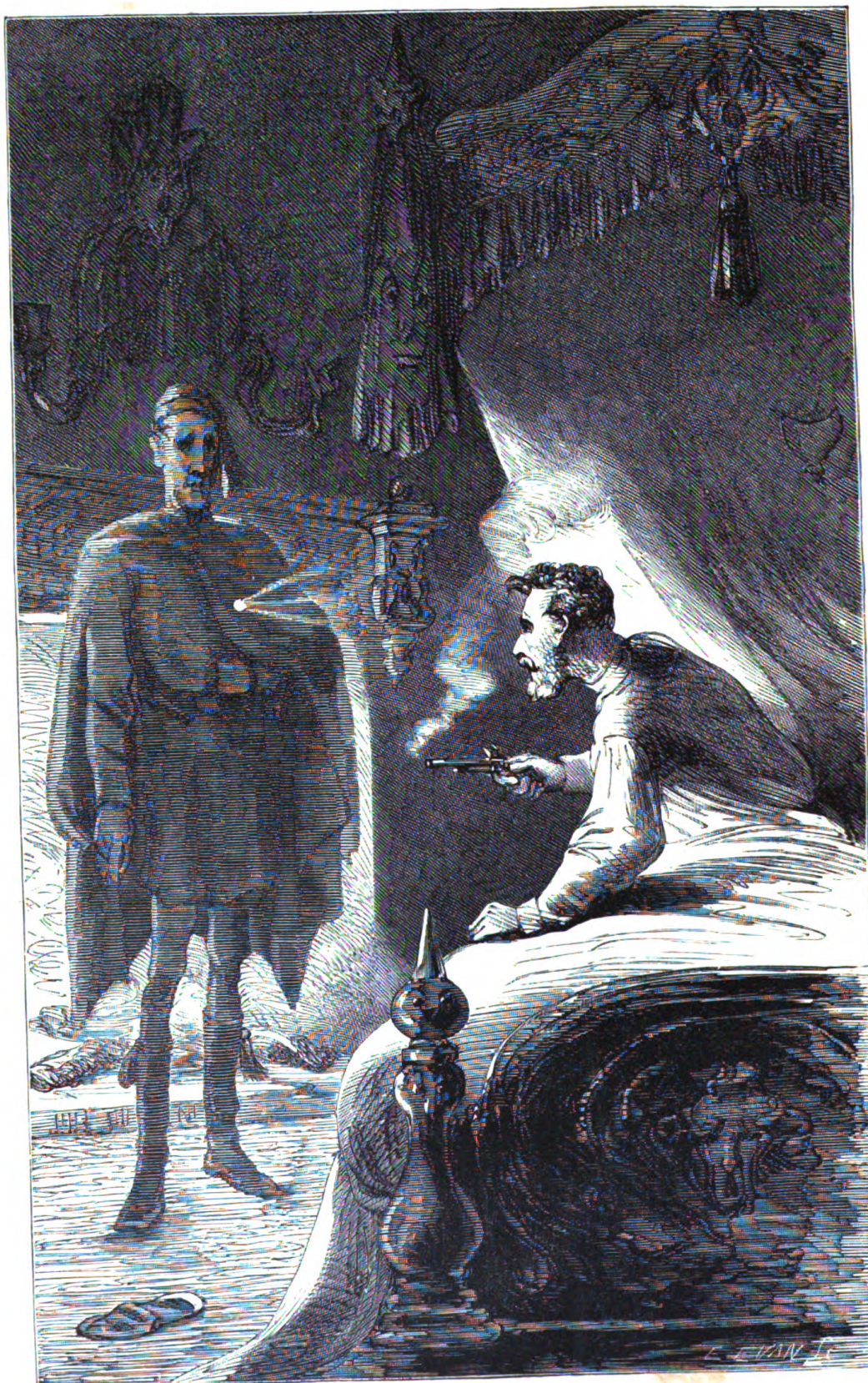
The house-clock was striking twelve as the Colonel awoke. He awoke suddenly from a sound sleep, flashing, as it were, into full consciousness, his mind and memory clear, all his faculties invigorated, his ideas undisturbed, but with a perfect conviction that he was not alone.

He lifted his head. A man was standing a few feet from the bed, and between it and the fire, which was still burning, and burning brightly enough to display every object in the room, and to define the outline of the intruder clearly. His dress also and his features were plainly distinguishable: the dress was a travelling-costume, in fashion somewhat out of date; the features wore a mournful and distressed expression—the eyes were fixed upon the Colonel. The right arm hung down, and the hand, partially concealed, might, for aught the Colonel knew, be grasping one of his own revolvers; the left arm was folded against the waist. The man seemed about to advance still closer to the bed, and returned the occupant's gaze with a fixed stare.

'Stand, or I'll fire!' cried the Colonel, taking in all this at a glance, and starting up in his bed, revolver in hand.







THE COLONEL'S SHOT.



The man remained still.

'What is your business here?' demanded the statesman, thinking he was addressing one of the roughs from below.

The man was silent.

'Leave this room, if you value your life,' shouted the indignant soldier, pointing his revolver.

The man was motionless.

'RETIRE! or by heaven I'll send a bullet through you!'

But the man moved not an inch.

The Colonel fired. The bullet lodged in the breast of the stranger, but he started not. The soldier leapt to the floor and fired again. The shot entered the heart, pierced the body, and lodged in the wall beyond; and the Colonel beheld the hole where the bullet had entered, and the firelight glimmering through it. And yet the intruder stirred not. Astounded, the Colonel dropped his revolver, and stood face to face before the unmoved man.

'Colonel Demarion,' spake the deep solemn voice of the perforated stranger, 'in vain you shoot me—I am dead already.'

The soldier, with all his bravery, gasped, spell-bound. The firelight gleamed through the hole in the body, and the eyes of the shooter were riveted there.

'Fear nothing,' spake the mournful presence; 'I seek but to divulge my wrongs. Until my death shall be avenged my unquiet spirit lingers here. Listen.'

Speechless, motionless was the statesman; and the mournful apparition thus slowly and distinctly continued:

'Four years ago I travelled with one I trusted. We lodged here. That night my comrade murdered me. He plunged a dagger into my heart while I slept. He covered the wound with a plaster. He feigned to mourn my death. He told the people here I had died of

heart-complaint; that I had long been ailing. I had gold and treasures. With my treasure secreted beneath his garments he paraded mock grief at my grave. Then he departed. In distant parts he sought to forget his crime; but his stolen gold brought him only the curse of an evil conscience. Rest and peace are not for him. He now prepares to leave his native land for ever. Under an assumed name that man is this night in Charleston. In a few hours he will sail for Europe. Colonel Demarion, you must prevent it. Justice and humanity demand that a murderer roam not at large, nor squander more of the wealth that is by right my children's.'

The spirit paused. To the extraordinary revelation the Colonel had listened in rapt astonishment. He gazed at the presence, at the firelight glimmering through it—through the very place where a human heart would be—and he felt that he was indeed in the presence of a supernatural being. He thought of the landlord's story; but while earnestly desiring to sift the truth of the mystery, words refused to come to his aid.

'Do you hesitate?' said the mournful spirit. 'Will *you* also flee, when my orphan children cry for retribution?' Seeming to anticipate the will of the Colonel, 'I await your promise, senator,' he said. 'There is no time to lose.'

With a mighty effort, the South Carolinian said, 'I promise. What would you have me do?'

In the same terse, solemn manner, the ghostly visitor gave the real and assumed names of the murderer, described his person and dress at the present time, described a certain curious ring he was then wearing, together with other distinguishing characteristics: all being carefully noted down by Colonel Demarion, who, by degrees,

recovered his self-possession, and pledged himself to use every endeavour to bring the murderer to justice.

Then, with a portentous wave of the hand, 'It is well,' said the apparition. 'Not until the spirit of my murderer shall be separated from the mortal clay can *my* spirit rest in peace.' And vanished.

Half-past six in the morning was the appointed time for the steamer to leave Charleston; and the Colonel lost not a moment in preparing to depart. As he hurried down the stairs he encountered the landlord, who—his eyes rolling in terror—made an attempt to speak. Unheeding, except to demand his carriage, the Colonel pushed past him, and effected a quick escape towards the back premises, shouting lustily for 'Jo' and 'Plato,' and for his carriage to be got ready immediately. A few minutes more, and the bewildered host was recalled to the terrible truth by the noise of the carriage dashing through the yard and away down the road; and it was some miles nearer Charleston before the unfortunate man ceased to peer after it in the darkness—as if by so doing he could recover damages—and bemoan to Jo the utter ruin of his house and hopes.

Thirty miles of hard driving had to be accomplished in little more than five hours. No great achievement under favourable circumstances; but the horses were only half refreshed from their yesterday's journey, and though the storm was over, the roads were in a worse condition than ever.

Colonel Demarion resolved to be true to his promise; and fired by a curiosity to investigate the extraordinary communication which had been revealed to him, urged on his horses, and reached the wharf at Charleston just as the

steamer was being loosed from her moorings.

He hailed her. 'Stop her! Business with the captain! STOP HER!'

Her machinery was already in motion; her iron lungs were puffing forth dense clouds of smoke and steam; and as the Colonel shouted—the crowd around, from sheer delight in shouting, echoing his 'Stop her! stop her!'—the voices on land were confounded with the voices of the sailors, the rattling of chains, and the hauling of ropes.

Among the passengers standing to wave farewells to their friends on the wharf were some who recognised Colonel Demarion, and drew the captain's attention towards him; and as he continued vehemently to gesticulate, that officer, from his post of observation, demanded the nature of the business which should require the ship's detention. Already the steamer was clear of the wharf. In another minute she might be beyond reach of the voice; therefore, failing by gestures and entreaties to convince the captain of the importance of his errand, Colonel Demarion, in desperation, cried at the top of his voice, 'A murderer on board! For God's sake, STOP!' He wished to have made this startling declaration in private, but not a moment was to be lost; and the excitement around him was intense.

In the midst of the confusion another cry of 'Man overboard!' might have been heard in a distant part of the ship, had not the attention of the crowd been fastened on the Colonel. Such a cry was, however, uttered, offering a still more urgent motive for stopping; and the steamer being again made fast, Colonel Demarion was received on board.

'Let not a soul leave the vessel!' was his first and prompt suggestion; and the order being issued, he

drew the captain aside, and concisely explained his grave commission. The captain thereupon conducted him to his private room, and summoned the steward, before whom the details were given, and the description of the murderer was read over. The steward, after considering attentively, seemed inclined to associate the description with that of a passenger whose remarkably-dejected appearance had already attracted his observation. In such a grave business it was, however, necessary to proceed with the utmost caution, and the 'passenger-book' was produced. Upon reference to its pages, the three gentlemen were totally dismayed by the discovery that the name of this same dejected individual was that under which, according to the apparition, the murderer had engaged his passage.

'I am here to charge that man with murder,' said Colonel Demarion. 'He must be arrested.'

Horried as the captain was at this astounding declaration, yet, on account of the singular and unusual mode by which the Colonel had become possessed of the facts, and the impossibility of proving the charge, he hesitated in consenting to the arrest of a passenger. The steward proposed that they should repair to the saloons and deck, and while conversing with one or another of the passengers, mention—as it were casually—in the hearing of the suspected party his own proper name, and observe the effect produced on him. To this they agreed, and without loss of time joined the passengers, assigning some feasible cause for a short delay of the ship.

The saloon was nearly empty, and while the steward went below, the other two repaired to the deck, where they observed a crowd gathered seaward, apparently watching something over the ship's side.

During the few minutes which had detained the captain in this necessarily-hurried business, a boat had been lowered, and some sailors had put off in her to rescue the person who was supposed to have fallen overboard; and it was only now, on joining the crowd, that the captain learned the particulars of the accident. 'Who was it?' 'What was he like?' they exclaimed simultaneously. That a man had fallen overboard was all that could be ascertained. Someone had seen him run across the deck, looking wildly about him. A splash in the water had soon afterwards attracted attention to the spot, and a body had since been seen struggling on the surface. The waves were rough after the storm, and thick with seaweed, and the sailors had as yet missed the body. The two gentlemen took their post among the watchers, and kept their eyes intently upon the waves, and upon the sailors battling against them. Ere long they see the body rise again to the surface. Floated on a powerful wave, they can for the few moments breathlessly scrutinise it. The colour of the dress is observed. A face of agony upturned displays a peculiar contour of forehead; the hair, the beard; and now he struggles—an arm is thrown up, and a remarkable ring catches the Colonel's eye. 'Great heavens! The whole description tallies!' The sailors pull hard for the spot, the next stroke and they will rescue—

A monster shark is quicker than they. The sea is tinged with blood. The man is no more!

Shocked and silent, Colonel Demarion and the captain quitted the deck and ressumoned the steward, who had, but without success, visited the berths and various parts of the ship for the individual in question. Every hole and corner was now, by the captain's order,

carefully searched, but in vain; and as no further information concerning the missing party could be obtained, and the steward persisted in his statement regarding his general appearance, they proceeded to examine his effects. In these he was identified beyond a doubt. Papers and relics proved not only his guilt but his remorse; remorse which, as the apparition had said, permitted him no peace in his wanderings.

Those startling words, 'A mur-

derer on board!' had doubtless struck fresh terror to his heart; and, unable to face the accusation, he had thus terminated his wretched existence.

Colonel Demarion revisited the little tavern, and on several occasions occupied the haunted chamber; but never again had he the honour of receiving a midnight commission from a ghostly visitor, and never again had the landlord to bemoan the flight of a non-paying customer.

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## PICHON & SONS, OF THE CROIX ROUSSE.

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GIRAUDIER, *pharmacien, première classe*, is the legend, recorded in huge, ill-proportioned letters, which directs the attention of the stranger to the most prosperous-looking shop in the grand *place* of La Croix Rousse, a well-known suburb of the beautiful city of Lyons, which has its share of the shabby gentility and poor pretence common to the suburban commerce of great towns.

Giraudier is not only *pharmacien* but *propriétaire*, though not by inheritance; his possession of one of the prettiest and most prolific of the small vineyards in the beautiful suburb, and a charming inconvenient house, with low ceilings, liliputian bedrooms, and a profusion of *persiennes*, *jalousies*, and *contrevents*, comes by purchase. This enviable little *terre* was sold by the Nation, when that terrible abstraction transacted the public business of France; and it was bought very cheaply by the strong-minded father of the Giraudier of the present, who was not disturbed by the evil reputation which the place had gained,

at a time when the peasants of France, having been bullied into a renunciation of religion, eagerly cherished superstition. The Giraudier of the present cherishes the particular superstition in question affectionately; it reminds him of an uncommonly good bargain made in his favour, which is always a pleasant association of ideas, especially to a Frenchman, still more especially to a Lyonnais; and it attracts strangers to his *pharmacie*, and leads to transactions in *Grand Chartreuse* and *Crème de Roses*, ensuing naturally on the narration of the history of Pichon and Sons. Giraudier is not of aristocratic principles and sympathies; on the contrary, he has decided republican leanings, and considers *Le Progrès* a masterpiece of journalistic literature; but, as he says simply and strongly, 'it is not because a man is a marquis that one is not to keep faith with him; a bad action is not good because it harms a good-for-nothing of a noble; the more when that good-for-nothing is no longer



a noble, but *pour rire*.' At the easy price of acquiescence in these sentiments, the stranger hears one of the most authentic, best-remembered, most popular of the many traditions of the bad old times 'before General Buonaparte,' as Giraudier, who has no sympathy with any later designation of *le grand homme*, calls the Emperor, whose statue one can perceive—a speck in the distance—from the threshold of the *pharmacie*.

The Marquis de Sénanges, in the days of the triumph of the great Revolution, was fortunate enough to be out of France, and wise enough to remain away from that country, though he persisted, long after the old *régime* was as dead as the Ptolemies, in believing it merely suspended, and the Revolution a lamentable accident of vulgar complexion, but happily temporary duration. The Marquis de Sénanges, who affected the *style régence*, and was the politest of infidels and the most refined of voluptuaries, got on indifferently in inappreciative foreign parts; but the members of his family—his brother and sisters, two of whom were guillotined, while the third escaped to Savoy and found refuge there in a convent of her order—got on exceedingly ill in France. If the *ci-devant* Marquis had had plenty of money to expend in such feeble imitations of his accustomed pleasures as were to be had out of Paris, he would not have been much affected by the fate of his relatives. But money became exceedingly scarce; the Marquis had actually beheld many of his peers reduced to the necessity of earning the despicable but indispensable article after many ludicrous fashions. And the duration of this absurd upsetting of law, order, privilege, and property began to assume unexpected and very unpleasant proportions.

The Château de Sénanges, with its surrounding lands, was confiscated to the Nation, during the third year of the 'emigration' of the Marquis de Sénanges; and the greater part of the estate was purchased by a thrifty, industrious, and rich *avocat*, named Prosper Alix, a widower with an only daughter. Prosper Alix enjoyed the esteem of the entire neighbourhood. First, he was rich; secondly, he was of a taciturn disposition, and of a neutral tint in politics. He had done well under the old *régime*, and he was doing well under the new—thank God, or the Supreme Being, or the First Cause, or the goddess Reason herself, for all;—he would have invoked Dagon, Moloch, or Kali, quite as readily as the Saints and the Madonna, who had gone so utterly out of fashion of late. Nobody was afraid to speak out before Prosper Alix; he was not a spy; and though a cold-hearted man, except in the instance of his only daughter, he never harmed anybody.

Very likely it was because he was the last person in the vicinity whom anybody would have suspected of being applied to by the dispossessed family, that the son of the Marquis's brother, a young man of promise, of courage, of intellect, and of morals of decidedly a higher calibre than those actually and traditionally imputed to the family, sought the aid of the new possessor of the Château de Sénanges, which had changed its old title for that of the Maison Alix. The father of M. Paul de Sénanges had perished in the September massacres; his mother had been guillotined at Lyons; and he—who had been saved by the interposition of a young comrade, whose father had, in the wonderful rotations of the wheel of Fate, acquired authority in the place where he had once esteemed the notice of

the nephew of the Marquis a crowning honour for his son—had passed through the common vicissitudes of that dreadful time, which would take a volume for their recital in each individual instance.

Paul de Sénanges was a handsome young fellow, frank, high-spirited, and of a brisk and happy temperament; which, however, modified by the many misfortunes he had undergone, was not permanently changed. He had plenty of capacity for enjoyment in him still; and as his position was very isolated, and his mind had become enlightened on social and political matters to an extent in which the men of his family would have discovered utter degradation, and the women diabolical possession, he would not have been very unhappy if, under the new condition of things, he could have lived in his native country and gained an honest livelihood. But he could not do that, he was too thoroughly 'suspect;' the antecedents of his family were too powerful against him: his only chance would have been to have gone into the popular camp as an extreme, violent partisan, to have out-Heroded the revolutionary Herods; and that Paul de Sénanges was too honest to do. So he was reduced to being thankful that he had escaped with his life, and to watching for an opportunity of leaving France and gaining some country where the reign of liberty, fraternity, and equality was not quite so oppressive.

The long-looked-for opportunity at length offered itself, and Paul de Sénanges was instructed by his uncle the Marquis that he must contrive to reach Marseilles, whence he should be transported to Spain—in which country the illustrious emigrant was then residing—by a certain named date. His uncle's

communication arrived safely, and the plan proposed seemed a secure and eligible one. Only in two respects was it calculated to make Paul de Sénanges thoughtful. The first was, that his uncle should take any interest in the matter of his safety; the second, what could be the nature of a certain deposit which the Marquis's letter directed him to procure, if possible, from the Château de Sénanges. The fact of this injunction explained, in some measure, the first of the two difficulties. It was plain that whatever were the contents of this packet which he was to seek for, according to the indications marked on a ground-plan drawn by his uncle and enclosed in the letter, the Marquis wanted them, and could not procure them except by the agency of his nephew. That the Marquis should venture to direct Paul de Sénanges to put himself in communication with Prosper Alix, would have been surprising to any one acquainted only with the external and generally-understood features of the character of the new proprietor of the Château de Sénanges. But a few people knew Prosper Alix thoroughly, and the Marquis was one of the number; he was keen enough to know in theory that, in the case of a man with only one weakness, that is likely to be a very weak weakness indeed, and to apply the theory to the *avocat*. The beautiful, pious, and aristocratic mother of Paul de Sénanges—a lady to whose superiority the Marquis had rendered the distinguished testimony of his dislike, not hesitating to avow that she was 'much too good for *his* taste'—had been very fond of, and very kind to, the motherless daughter of Prosper Alix, and he held her memory in reverence which he accorded to nothing beside, human or divine, and taught his daughter the matchless worth of the friend

she had lost. The Marquis knew this, and though he had little sympathy with the sentiment, he believed he might use it in the present instance to his own profit, with safety. The event proved that he was right. Private negotiations, with the manner of whose transaction we are not concerned, passed between the *avocat* and the *ci-devant* Marquis; and the young man, then leading a life in which skulking had a large share, in the vicinity of Dijon, was instructed to present himself at the Maison Alix, under the designation of Henri Glaire, and in the character of an artist in house-decoration. The circumstances of his life in childhood and boyhood had led to his being almost safe from recognition as a man at Lyons; and, indeed, all the people on the *ci-devant* visiting-list of the château had been pretty nearly killed off, in the noble and patriotic ardour of the revolutionary times.

The ancient Château de Sénanges was proudly placed near the summit of the 'Holy Hill,' and had suffered terrible depredations when the church at Fourvières was sacked, and the shrine desecrated with that ingenious impiety which is characteristic of the French; but it still retained somewhat of its former heavy grandeur. The château was much too large for the needs, tastes, or ambition of its present owner, who was too wise, if even he had been of an ostentatious disposition, not to have sedulously resisted its promptings. The jealousy of the nation of brothers was easily excited, and departure from simplicity and frugality was apt to be commented upon by domiciliary visits, and the eager imposition of fanciful fines. That portion of the vast building occupied by Prosper Alix and the *citoyenne* Berthe, his daughter, presented an appearance of well-to-do comfort

and modest ease, which contrasted with the grandiose proportions and the elaborate decorations of the wide corridors, huge flat staircases, and lofty paneled apartments. The *avocat* and his daughter lived quietly in the old place, hoping, after a general fashion, for better times, but not finding the present very bad; the father becoming day by day more pleasant with his bargain, the daughter growing fonder of the great house, and the noble *bocages*, of the scrappy little vineyards, struggling for existence on the sunny hill-side, and the place where the famous shrine had been. They had done it much damage; they had parted its riches among them; the once ever-open doors were shut, and the worn flags were untrodden; but nothing could degrade it, nothing could destroy what had been, in the mind of Berthe Alix, who was as devout as her father was unconcernedly unbelieving. Berthe was wonderfully well educated for a Frenchwoman of that period, and surprisingly handsome for a Frenchwoman of any. Not too tall to offend the taste of her compatriots, and not too short to be dignified and graceful, she had a symmetrical figure, and a small, well-poised head, whose profuse, shining, silken dark-brown hair she wore as nature intended, in a shower of curls, never touched by the hand of the coiffeur, —curls which clustered over her brow, and fell far down on her shapely neck. Her features were fine; the eyes very dark, and the mouth very red; the complexion clear and rather pale, and the style of the face and its expression lofty. When Berthe Alix was a child, people were accustomed to say she was pretty and refined enough to belong to the aristocracy; nobody would have dared to say so now, prettiness and refinement, together with all the other virtues admitted to a place

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on the patriotic roll, having become national property.

Berthe loved her father dearly. She was deeply impressed with the sense of her supreme importance to him, and fully comprehended that he would be influenced by and through her when all other persuasion or argument would be unavailing. When Prosper Alix wished and intended to do anything rather mean or selfish, he did it without letting Berthe know; and when he wished to leave undone something which he knew his daughter would decide ought to be done, he carefully concealed from her the existence of the dilemma. Nevertheless, this system did not prevent the father and daughter being very good and even confidential friends. Prosper Alix loved his daughter immeasurably, and respected her more than he respected anyone in the world. With regard to her persevering religiousness, when such things were not only out of fashion and date, but illegal as well, he was very tolerant. Of course it was weak, and an absurdity; but every woman, even his beautiful, incomparable Berthe, was weak and absurd on some point or other; and, after all, he had come to the conclusion that the safest weakness with which a woman can be afflicted is that romantic and ridiculous *faiblesse* called piety. So these two lived a happy life together, Berthe's share of it being very secluded, and were wonderfully little troubled by the turbulence with which society was making its tumultuous way to the virtuous serenity of republican perfection.

The communication announcing the project of the *ci-devant* Marquis for the secure exportation of his nephew, and containing the skilful appeal before mentioned, grievously disturbed the tranquillity of Prosper, and was precisely one of those incidents which he would

especially have liked to conceal from his daughter. But he could not do so; the appeal was too cleverly made; and utter indifference to it, utter neglect of the letter, which naturally suggested itself as the easiest means of getting rid of a difficulty, would have involved an act of direct and uncompromising dishonesty to which Prosper, though of sufficiently elastic conscience within the limit of professional gains, could not contemplate. The Château de Sénanges was indeed his own lawful property; his without prejudice to the former owners, dispossessed by no act of his. But the *ci-devant* Marquis—confiding in him to an extent which was quite astonishing, except on the *pis-aller* theory, which is so unflattering as to be seldom accepted—announced to him the existence of a certain packet, hidden in the château, acknowledging its value, and urging the need of its safe transmission. This was not his property. He heartily wished he had never learned its existence, but wishing that was clearly of no use; then he wished the nephew of the *ci-devant* might come soon, and take himself and the hidden wealth away with all possible speed. This latter was a more realisable desire, and Prosper settled his mind with it, communicated the interesting but decidedly dangerous secret to Berthe, received her warm sanction, and transmitted to the Marquis, by the appointed means, an assurance that his wishes should be punctually carried out. The absence of an interdiction of his visit before a certain date was to be the signal to M. Paul de Sénanges that he was to proceed to act upon his uncle's instructions; he waited the proper time, the reassuring silence was maintained unbroken, and he ultimately set forth on his journey, and accomplished it in safety.



Preparations had been made at the Maison Alix for the reception of M. Glaire, and his supposed occupation had been announced. The apartments were decorated in a heavy, gloomy style, and those of the *citoyenne* in particular (they had been occupied by a lady who had once been designated as *feue Madame la Marquise*, but who was referred to now as *la mère du ci-devant*) were much in need of renovation. The alcove, for instance, was all that was least gay and most far from simple. The *citoyenne* would have all that changed. On the morning of the day of the expected arrival, Berthe said to her father :

‘It would seem as if the Marquis did not know the exact spot in which the packet is deposited. M. Paul’s assumed character implies the necessity for a search.’

M. Henri Glaire arrived at the Maison Alix, was fraternally received, and made acquainted with the sphere of his operations. The young man had a good deal of both ability and taste in the line he had assumed, and the part was not difficult to play. Some days were judiciously allowed to pass before the real object of the masquerade was pursued, and during that time cordial relations established themselves between the *avocat* and his guest. The young man was handsome, elegant, engaging, with all the external advantages, and devoid of the vices, errors, and hopeless infatuated unscrupulousness, of his class ; he had naturally quick intelligence, and some real knowledge and comprehension of life had been knocked into him by the hard-hitting blows of Fate. His face was like his mother’s, Prosper Alix thought, and his mind and tastes were of the very pattern which, in theory, Berthe approved. Berthe, a very unconventional French girl—who thought the new

era of purity, love, virtue, and disinterestedness ought to do away with marriage by barter as one of its most notable reforms, and had been disenchanted by discovering that the abolition of marriage altogether suited the taste of the incorruptible Republic better—might like, might even love, this young man. She saw so few men, and had no fancy for patriots ; she would certainly be obstinate about it if she did chance to love him. This would be a nice state of affairs. This would be a pleasant consequence of the confiding request of the *ci-devant*. Prosper wished with all his heart for the arrival of the concerted signal, which should tell Henri Glaire that he might fulfil the purpose of his sojourn at the Maison Alix, and set forth for Marseilles.

But the signal did not come, and the days—long, beautiful, sunny, soothing summer-days—went on. The painting of the panels of the *citoyenne’s* apartment, which she vacated for that purpose, progressed slowly ; and M. Paul de Sénanges, guided by the ground-plan, and aided by Berthe, had discovered the spot in which the jewels of price, almost the last remnants of the princely wealth of the Sénanges, had been hidden by the *femme-de-chambre* who had perished with her mistress, having confided a general statement of the fact to a priest, for transmission to the Marquis. This spot had been ingeniously chosen. The sleeping-apartment of the late Marquis was extensive, lofty, and provided with an alcove of sufficiently large dimensions to have formed in itself a handsome room. This space, containing a splendid but gloomy bed, on an estrade, and hung with rich faded brocade, was divided from the general extent of the apartment by a low railing of black oak, elaborately carved, opening in

the centre, and with a flat wide bar along the top, covered with crimson velvet. The curtains were contrived to hang from the ceiling, and, when let down inside the screen of railing, they matched the draperies which closed before the great stone balcony at the opposite end of the room. Since the *avocat's* daughter had occupied this palatial chamber, the curtains of the alcove had never been drawn, and she had substituted for them a high folding screen of black-and-gold Japanese pattern, also a relic of the grand old times, which stood about six feet on the outside of the rails that shut in her bed. The floor was of shining oak, testifying to the conscientious and successful labours of successive generations of *frotteurs*; and on the spot where the railing of the alcove opened by a pretty quaint device sundering the intertwined arms of a pair of very chubby cherubs, a square space in the floor was also richly carved.

The seekers soon reached the end of their search. A little effort removed the square of carved oak, and underneath they found a casket, evidently of old workmanship, richly wrought in silver, much tarnished but quite intact. It was agreed that this precious deposit should be replaced, and the carved square laid down over it, until the signal for his departure should reach Paul. The little baggage which under any circumstances he could have ventured to allow himself in the dangerous journey he was to undertake, must be reduced, so as to admit of his carrying the casket without exciting suspicion.

The finding of the hidden treasure was not the first joint discovery made by the daughter of the *avocat* and the son of the *ci-devant*. The cogitations of Prosper Alix were very wise, very reasonable; but they were a little tardy. Before

he had admitted the possibility of mischief, the mischief was done. Each had found out that the love of the other was indispensable to the happiness of life; and they had exchanged confidences, assurances, protestations, and promises, as freely, as fervently, and as hopefully, as if no such thing as a Republic, one and indivisible, with a keen scent and an unappeasable thirst for the blood of aristocrats, existed. They forgot all about 'Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality'—these egotistical, narrow-minded young people;—they also forgot the characteristic alternative to those unparalleled blessings—'Death.' But Prosper Alix did not forget any of these things; and his consternation, his prevision of suffering for his beloved daughter, were terrible, when she told him, with a simple noble frankness which the *grandes dames* of the dead-and-gone time of great ladies had rarely had a chance of exhibiting, that she loved M. Paul de Sénanges, and intended to marry him when the better times should come. Perhaps she meant when that alternative of *death* should be struck off the sacred formula;—of course she meant to marry him with the sanction of her father, which she made no doubt she should receive.

Prosper Alix was in pitiable perplexity. He could not bear to terrify his daughter by a full explanation of the danger she was incurring; he could not bear to delude her with false hope. If this young man could be got away at once safely, there was not much likelihood that he would ever be able to return to France. Would Berthe pine for him, or would she forget him, and make a rational, sensible, rich, republican marriage, which would not imperil either her reputation for pure patriotism or her father's? The latter would be the very best thing that could possibly happen, and therefore it was

decidedly unwise to calculate upon it; but, after all, it was possible; and Prosper had not the courage, in such a strait, to resist the hopeful promptings of a possibility. How ardently he regretted that he had complied with the prayer of the *ci-devant*! When would the signal for M. Paul's departure come?

Prosper Alix had made many sacrifices, had exercised much self-control for his daughter's sake; but he had never sustained a more severe trial than this, never suffered more than he did now, under the strong necessity for hiding from her his absolute conviction of the impossibility of a happy result for this attachment, in that future to which the lovers looked so fearlessly. He could not even make his anxiety and apprehension known to Paul de Sénanges; for he did not believe the young man had sufficient strength of will to conceal anything so important from the keen and determined observation of Berthe.

The expected signal was not given, and the lovers were incautious. The seclusion of the Maison Alix had all the danger, as well as all the delight, of solitude, and Paul dropped his disguise too much and too often. The servants, few in number, were of the truest patriotic principles, and to some of them the denunciation of the *citoyen*, whom they condescended to serve because the sacred Revolution had not yet made them as rich as he, would have been a delightful duty, a sweet-smelling sacrifice to be laid on the altar of the country. They heard certain names and places mentioned; they perceived many things which led them to believe that Henri Glaire was not an industrial artist and pure patriot, worthy of respect, but a wretched *ci-devant*, resorting to the dignity of labour to make up for the righte-

ous destruction of every other kind of dignity. One day a gardener, of less stoical virtue than his fellows, gave Prosper Alix a warning that the presence of a *ci-devant* upon his premises was suspected, and that he might be certain a domiciliary visit, attended with dangerous results to himself, would soon take place. Of course the *avocat* did not commit himself by any avowal to this lukewarm patriot; but he casually mentioned that Henri Glaire was about to take his leave. What was to be done? He must not leave the neighbourhood without receiving the instructions he was awaiting; but he must leave the house, and be supposed to have gone quite away. Without any delay or hesitation, Prosper explained the facts to Berthe and her lover, and insisted on the necessity for an instant parting. Then the courage and the readiness of the girl told. There was no crying, and very little trembling; she was strong and helpful.

'He must go to Pichon's, father,' she said, 'and remain there until the signal is given.—Pichon is a master-mason, Paul,' she continued, turning to her lover, 'and his wife was my nurse. They are avaricious people; but they are fond of me in their way, and they will shelter you faithfully enough, when they know that my father will pay them handsomely. You must go at once, unseen by the servants; they are at supper. Fetch your valise, and bring it to my room. We will put the casket in it, and such of your things as you must take out to make room for it, we can hide under the plank. My father will go with you to Pichon's, and we will communicate with you there as soon as it is safe.'

Paul followed her to the large gloomy room where the treasure lay, and they took the casket from

its hiding-place. It was heavy, though not large, and an awkward thing to pack away among linen in a small valise. They managed it, however, and, the brief preparation completed, the moment of parting arrived. Firmly and eloquently, though in haste, Berthe assured Paul of her changeless love and faith, and promised him to wait for him for any length of time in France, if better days should be slow of coming, or to join him in some foreign land, if they were never to come. Her father was present, full of compassion and misgiving. At length he said,

'Come, Paul, you must leave her; every moment is of importance.'

The young man and his betrothed were standing on the spot whence they had taken the casket; the carved rail with the heavy curtains might have been the outer sanctuary of an altar, and they bride and bridegroom before it, with earnest, loving faces, and clasped hands.

'Farewell, Paul,' said Berthe; 'promise me once more, in this the moment of our parting, that you will come to me again, if you are alive, when the danger is past.'

'Whether I am living or dead, Berthe,' said Paul de Sénanges, strongly moved by some sudden inexplicable instinct, 'I will come to you again.'

In a few more minutes, Prosper Alix and his guest, who carried, not without difficulty, the small but heavy leather valise, had disappeared in the distance, and Berthe was on her knees before the *prie-dieu* of the *ci-devant* Marquise, her face turned towards the 'Holy Hill' of Fourvières.

Pichon, *maître*, and his sons, *garçons-maçons*, were well-to-do people, rather morose, exceedingly avaricious, and of taciturn dispositions; but they were not ill spoken

of by their neighbours. They had amassed a good deal of money in their time, and were just then engaged on a very lucrative job. This was the construction of several of the steep descents, by means of stairs, straight and winding, cut in the face of the *côteaux*, by which pedestrians are enabled to descend into the town. Pichon *père* was a *propriétaire* as well; his property was that which is now in the possession of Giraudier, *pharmacien, première classe*, and which was destined to attain a sinister celebrity during his proprietorship. One of the straightest and steepest of the stairways had been cut close to the *terre* which the mason owned, and a massive wall, destined to bound the high-road at the foot of the declivity, was in course of construction.

When Prosper Alix and Paul de Sénanges reached the abode of Pichon, the master-mason, with his sons and workmen, had just completed their day's work, and were preparing to eat the supper served by the wife and mother, a tall gaunt woman, who looked as if a more liberal scale of house-keeping would have done her good, but on whose features the stamp of that devouring and degrading avarice which is the commonest vice of the French peasantry, was set as plainly as on the hard faces of her husband and her sons. The *avocat* explained his business and introduced his companion briefly, and awaited the reply of Pichon *père* without any appearance of inquietude.

'You don't run any risk,' he said; 'at least, you don't run any risk which I cannot make it worth your while to incur. It is not the first time you have received a temporary guest on my recommendation. You know nothing about the citizen Glaire, except that he is recommended to you by me. I



am responsible ; you can, on occasion, make me so. The citizen may remain with you a short time ; can hardly remain long. Say, citizen, is it agreed ? I have no time to spare.'

It was agreed, and Prosper Alix departed, leaving M. Paul de Sénanges, convinced that the right, indeed the only, thing had been done, and yet much troubled and depressed.

Pichon père was a short, squat, powerfully-built man, verging on sixty, whose thick dark grizzled hair, sturdy limbs, and hard hands, on which the muscles showed like cords, spoke of endurance and strength ; he was, indeed, noted in the neighbourhood for those qualities. His sons resembled him slightly, and each other closely, as was natural, for they were twins. They were heavy, lumpish fellows, and they made but an ungracious return to the attempted civilities of the stranger, to whom the offer of their mother to show him his room was a decided relief. As he rose to follow the woman, Paul de Sénanges lifted his small valise with difficulty from the floor, on which he had placed it on entering the house, and carried it out of the room in both his arms. The brothers followed these movements with curiosity, and, when the door closed behind their mother and the stranger, their eyes met.

\* \* \* \* \*

Twenty-four hours had passed away, and nothing new had occurred at the Maison Alix. The servants had not expressed any curiosity respecting the departure of the citizen Glaire, no domiciliary visit had taken place, and Berthe and her father were discussing the propriety of Prosper's venturing, on the pretext of an excursion in another direction, a visit to the isolated and quiet dwelling of the master-mason. No signal had yet arrived.

It was agreed that after the lapse of another day, if their tranquillity remained undisturbed, Prosper Alix should visit Paul de Sénanges. Berthe, who was silent and preoccupied, retired to her own room early, and her father, who was uneasy and apprehensive, desperately anxious for the promised communication from the Marquis, was relieved by her absence.

The moon was high in the dark sky, and her beams were flung across the polished oak floor of Berthe's bedroom, through the great window with the stone balcony, when the girl, who had gone to sleep with her lover's name upon her lips in prayer, awoke with a sudden start, and sat up in her bed. An unbearable dread was upon her ; and yet she was unable to utter a cry, she was unable to make another movement. Had she heard a voice ? No, no one had spoken, nor did she fancy that she heard any sound. But within her, somewhere inside her heaving bosom, something said, ' Berthe !'

And she listened, and knew what it was. And it spoke, and said :

' I promised you that, living or dead, I would come to you again. And I have come to you ; but not living.'

She was quite awake. Even in the agony of her fear she looked around, and tried to move her hands, to feel her dress and the bedclothes, and to fix her eyes on some familiar object, that she might satisfy herself, before this racing and beating, this whirling and yet icy chilliness of her blood should kill her outright, that she was really awake.

' I have come to you ; but not living.'

What an awful thing that voice speaking within her was ! She tried to raise her head and to look towards the place where the moon-

beams marked bright lines upon the polished floor, which lost themselves at the foot of the Japanese screen. She forced herself to this effort, and lifted her eyes, wild and haggard with fear, and there, the moonbeams at his feet, the tall black screen behind him, she saw Paul de Sénanges. She saw him; she looked at him quite steadily; she rose, slowly, with a mechanical movement, and stood upright beside her bed, clasping her forehead with her hands, and gazing at him. He stood motionless, in the dress he had worn when he took leave of her, the light-coloured riding-coat of the period, with a short cape, and a large white cravat tucked into the double breast. The white muslin was flecked, and the front of the riding-coat was deeply stained, with blood. He looked at her, and she took a step forward—another—then, with a desperate effort, she dashed open the railing and flung herself on her knees before him, with her arms stretched out as if to clasp him. But he was no longer there; the moonbeams fell clear and cold upon the polished floor, and lost themselves where Berthe lay, at the foot of the screen, her head upon the ground, and every sign of life gone from her.

\* \* \* \* \*

‘Where is the citizen Glaire?’ asked Prosper Alix of the *citoyenne* Pichon, entering the house of the master-mason abruptly, and with a stern and threatening countenance. ‘I have a message for him; I must see him.’

‘I know nothing about him,’ replied the *citoyenne*, without turning in his direction, or relaxing her culinary labours. ‘He went away from here the next morning, and I did not trouble myself to ask where; that is his affair.’

‘He went away? Without let-

ting me know! Be careful, *citoyenne*; this is a serious matter.’

‘So they tell me,’ said the woman with a grin, which was not altogether free from pain and fear; ‘for you! A serious thing to have a *suspect* in your house, and palm him off on honest people. However, he went away peaceably enough when he knew we had found him out, and that we had no desire to go to prison, or worse, on his account, or yours.’

She was strangely insolent, this woman, and the listener felt his helplessness; he had brought the young man there with such secrecy, he had so carefully provided for the success of concealment.

‘Who carried his valise?’ Prosper Alix asked her suddenly.

‘How should I know?’ she replied; but her hands lost their steadiness, and she upset a stew-pan; ‘he carried it here, didn’t he? and I suppose he carried it away again.’

Prosper Alix looked at her steadily—she shunned his gaze, but she showed no other sign of confusion; then horror and disgust of the woman came over him.

‘I must see Pichon,’ he said; ‘where is he?’

‘Where should he be but at the wall? he and the boys are working there, as always. The citizen can see them; but he will remember not to detain them; in a little quarter of an hour the soup will be ready.’

The citizen did see the master-mason and his sons, and after an interview of some duration he left the place in a state of violent agitation and complete discomfiture. The master-mason had addressed to him these words at parting:

‘I assert that the man went away at his own free will; but if you do not keep very quiet, I shall deny that he came here at all—

you cannot prove he did—and I will denounce you for harbouring a *suspect* and *ci-devant* under a false name. I know a De Sénanges when I see him as well as you, citizen Alix ; and, wishing M. Paul a good journey, I hope you will consider about this matter, for truly, my friend, I think you will sneeze in the sack before I shall.'

\* \* \* \* \*

'We must bear it, Berthe, my child,' said Prosper Alix to his daughter many weeks later, when the fever had left her, and she was able to talk with her father of the mysterious and frightful events which had occurred. 'We are utterly helpless. There is no proof, only the word of these wretches against mine, and certain destruction to me if I speak. We will go to Spain, and tell the Marquis all the truth, and never return, if you would rather not. But, for the rest, we must bear it.'

'Yes, my father,' said Berthe submissively, 'I know we must ; but God need not, and I don't believe He will.'

The father and the daughter left France unmolested, and Berthe 'bore it' as well as she could. When better times came they returned, Prosper Alix an old man, and Berthe a stern, silent, handsome woman, with whom no one associated any notions of love or marriage. But long before their return the traditions of the Croix Rousse were enriched by circumstances which led to that before-mentioned capital bargain made by the father of the Giraudier of the present. These circumstances were the violent death of Pichon and his two sons, who were killed by the fall of a portion of the great boundary-wall on the very day of its completion, and the discovery, close to its foundation, at the extremity of Pichon's *terre*, of the

corpse of a young man attired in a light-coloured riding-coat, who had been stabbed through the heart.

Berthe Alix lived alone in the Château de Sénanges, under its restored name, until she was a very old woman. She lived long enough to see the golden figure on the summit of the 'Holy Hill,' long enough to forget the bad old times, but not long enough to forget or cease to mourn the lover who had kept his promise, and come back to her ; the lover who rested in the earth which once covered the bones of the martyrs, and who kept a place for her by his side. She has filled that place for many years. You may see it, when you look down from the second gallery of the bell-tower at Fourvières, following the bend of the outstretched golden arm of Notre Dame.

The château was pulled down some years ago, and there is no trace of its former existence among the vines.

Good times, and bad times, and again good times have come for the Croix Rousse, for Lyons, and for France, since then ; but the remembrance of the treachery of Pichon and Sons, and of the retribution which at once exposed and punished their crime, outlives all changes. And once, every year, on a certain summer night, three ghostly figures are seen, by any who have courage and patience to watch for them, gliding along by the foot of the boundary-wall, two of them carrying a dangling corpse, and the other, implements for mason's work and a small leather valise. Giraudier, *pharmacien*, has never seen these ghostly figures, but he describes them with much minuteness ; and only the *esprits forts* of the Croix Rousse deny that the ghosts of Pichon and Sons are not yet laid.



# THE VICARAGE GHOST.

A LEGEND OF LANCASTER.

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FYTTE I.

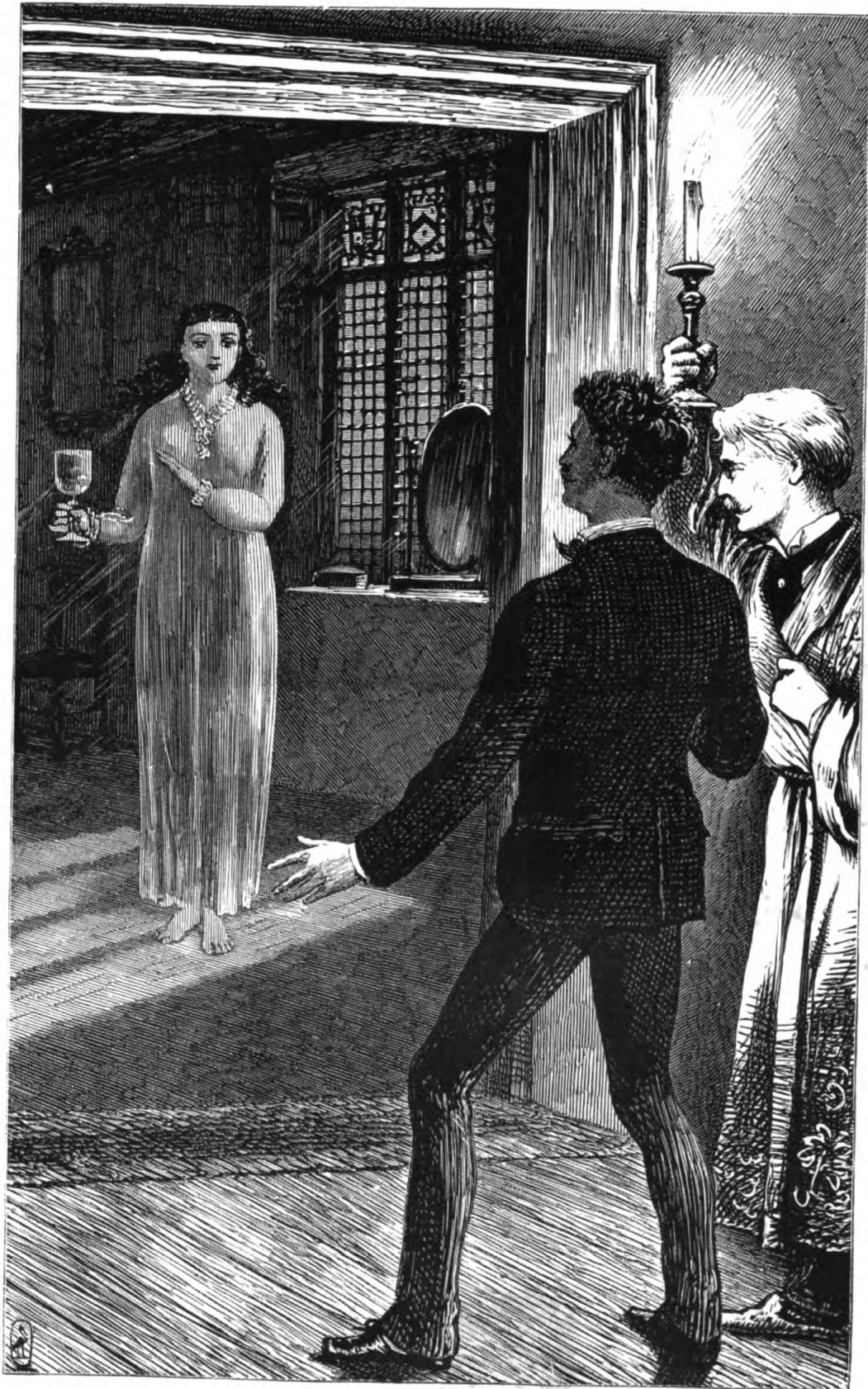
THE Vicarage windows were shady and dim,  
The Vicarage portal was gloomy and grim.  
    The ivy waved  
    And the wild wind raved  
In a very queer way round that rambling old Vicarage;  
    'Twas enough, by the powers !  
    In the shadowy hours  
To give to one's ghost-story gusto a quicker edge.

O the time, the merry, merry time,  
When over hedges and walls we climb,  
When we don't like reading the old Greek rhyme  
Which pedagogues always have voted sublime,  
When we hate the horrible schoolbell's chime—  
    The time of boyhood cheery !  
Than later hours it is better far,  
When youth goes smoking a bad cigar,  
Or manhood's dreams all golden are,  
    Or age of the world grows weary.

O pleasant hours for the thoughtless boy—  
Ankle-deep in the flowers of a healthful joy,  
For whom no powers can the gleam destroy  
    Which flows with his young pulse onward.  
Who looks not now with a vain regret,  
In the midst of the fever and toil and fret,  
On the joyous time when it pleased him yet  
    To gaze like the eagle sunward ?

'Twas winter chill, and the blasts were Boreal,  
And two fine little boys in the Vicarage oriel  
Were voting it slow—'twas the last of their jolly days !  
They were going to school at the end of the holidays.  
Alas for the end of the *tempus ludendi* !  
But pleasures and pastimes again and again die.  
There's an end to the bachelor's fun and flirtation—  
There's an end to the juvenile's Christmas vacation.

Harry and Frank had nothing to do  
Save watching the huge hall-fire burn blue,  
For their father, the Vicar, was gone out to dine,  
And was just in the midst of his walnuts and wine,  
And the nurserymaid, who was called Caroline;



THE VICARAGE GHOST.





Was singing quaint ballads, a thing she was rich in,  
To a very mixed company down in the kitchen.

And had there been lights

*The Arabian Nights*

Were not then in the number of boyhood's delights,  
Nor that glorious book to whose pages we grew so—  
Unveracious, miraculous Robinson Crusoe.

So out of the window looked Harry and Frank  
On the grass in the avenue moist and dank,  
And they couldn't contrive to be merry or gay,  
For the very next morn they were going away ;  
Their boxes were packed, very much to their sorrow—  
They'll be off to the precincts of Rugby to-morrow,  
Where to upper-form despots they'll have to knock under,  
Where they're certain to catch it for every blunder—  
And they couldn't tell now, for a lollipop pension,  
The genitive case of the second declension :  
Five o'clock the next day will see Harry and Frank astir,  
On the top of the mail—far away from dear Lancaster.

Hey, presto ! pass !

Cry no more ' Alas !'

There's a frosty-faced crone on the avenue grass !

An old match-vender—

May blessings attend her !—

They'd rather see her than the king in his splendour ;  
For she's stories for summer and winter—whole hosts,  
And the best of the lot are of goblins and ghosts.

Frank and Harry full oft had listened,  
While their cheeks grew pale and their young eyes glistened,

And all night long

A terrible throng,

An army of demons thousands strong,

Had roared like the sound of the sea's wild billows—

Had kept them half-frantic

With horrible antic,

Made mouths in the curtains and haunted the pillows ;

For there's probably nothing so very bewildering

As stories of ghosts to fanciful children.

But greatly did Harry and Frank rejoice

At the guttural sound of the old woman's voice ;

And they both ran out, and they pulled her in,

And they hailed the old lady with merriest din ;

And they cried in a breath

' We're tired to death—

O, tell us a tale of a ghost ! now do !

It's a capital time, for the fire burns blue.'

So down in a chair sat the tale-teller hoary,

And thus began she the

Old Woman's Story !

## FYTTE II.

A century back (said the frosty-faced crone)  
I was a beautiful girl, be it known—

A charming young girl ;  
My teeth were like pearl ;  
My long sunny hair had a delicate curl  
That set many a brain in a terrible whirl ;  
I was fit for a bride to a baron or earl :

My smile was like light,  
My eyes were as bright  
As the stars any night,  
And my foot was so tripping, my waist was so tight,  
That everyone used of my beauty to sing,  
As the sweetest, completest, and neatest young thing  
(Except one) that had set folks of every rank astir  
In the beauty-adoring old borough of Lancaster.

But out and alas ! for my tongue is not able  
To tell of that other, my sweet sister Mabel—

Such eyes !  
Like the skies :  
Such lips !  
The tips  
Of the richest of rosebuds they'd surely eclipse :  
Such a nose !  
Such toes !

Peeping daintily out from the nameless *chose*  
That serves to conceal them, as everyone knows :  
O the dear little creature ! alack and alas !  
Over her tomb waves the long green grass ;  
Her lovers are dead  
In elm coffins or lead ;

Her beauties are lost, for there's no one to chant 'em,  
And she only appears in the shape of a phantom.

The Reverend Harry Delisle was the Vicar  
Of Lancaster then, and one's pulses beat quicker  
When he got in the pulpit the people to teach—  
O, wasn't young Harry a fellow to preach !  
If vicars and rectors were only like him,  
There'd soon be an end to the Puseyite whim ;  
The nation would stick to their natural mentors,  
And there'd never be any Noncons or Dissenters.

Mister Delisle lived a bachelor life,  
Having ne'er met with any he liked for a wife :  
His mother lived with him, the proudest old lady  
That ever gave vent to a ' How now ! ' or ' Hey-day ! '

And a story was told  
How she wished him for gold  
To marry a personage almost as old,  
A Viscountess Periwigg, very unlovable,  
Whose eyes, teeth, and tresses were all of them movable.

O, therefore imagine the lady's surprise,  
And the furious fire that flashed out of her eyes,  
When she heard that her Harry  
Was wishing to marry  
The beautiful Mabel—'A peasant! a pauper!'  
The old woman raged so her son couldn't stop her—  
'He'd better be dead  
Than dare to wed  
Such a vulgar, penniless Ringletona.'  
But Mister Delisle  
Was determined, the while,  
Preferring her ringlets to anyone's rhino.

Merrily sounded the marriage-bells—  
Pleasant and warm was the air of June—  
The echoes rang through the glades and dells  
From St. Mary's Church to the banks of Lune;  
There wasn't a cloud in the bright blue sky,  
There wasn't a tear in a single eye,  
There was nothing to worry, or bother, or pester,  
When Harry Delisle  
In a bran-new tile,  
And Mabel bright  
In robes of white,  
Were married all right by the Bishop of Chester.

And as for the breakfast! the fowls! the champagne!  
The speeches and toasts! how again and again  
They drank to the Vicar, old Lancaster's pride,  
And to beautiful Mabel, his dear little bride!  
Then her form full of grace,  
And her sweet pretty face,  
And the Mechlin lace,  
Enraptured, I'm sure, every soul in the place.  
Meanwhile at the door  
A chariot and four  
Was waiting to take them away to Lodore,  
Where it comes sparkling,  
Flashing and darkling,  
As Southey has told us, to Derwent's green shore.  
They come down, and instant  
Are off at a canter,  
Intending to spend the sweet month of their bridal  
At Windermere, Ulleswater, Grasmere, and Rydal—  
With boating and climbing,  
And sketching and rhyming,  
And other delights of the happy and idle;  
And not to return to their old-fashioned dwelling  
In Lancaster, till  
They'd climbed every hill  
From the mighty Old Man to Sca Fell and Helvellyn.



## FYTTE III.

Alas for the fate of my sweet sister Mabel !  
 To finish the story I hardly am able.  
     Very bright was the day,  
     And the town very gay,  
 When the Vicar came back from his holiday ramble ;  
     And the bells rang aloud,  
     And the banners waved proud,  
     And shouted the crowd,  
 Who pressed round the carriage with many a gambol :  
 Such rejoicings in Lancaster ne'er were seen yet—  
 They filled up two columns of that week's *Gazette*.

Ah me, that a morning so very delightful  
 Should lead to a midnight of tragedy frightful !  
     Who could fancy or guess  
     What a terrible mess  
 Would follow all this fun ? Not I, I confess.  
 Who imagined that soon as old Phœbus should sink west  
 There'd be matter requiring a coroner's inquest ?

Old Abigail Deborah Bridget Delisle  
 (The Vicar's mamma) welcomed all with a smile ;  
 Her former perversity seemed like a fable,  
 She was so exceedingly courteous to Mabel ;  
     She hugged her and kissed her,  
     My dear little sister !  
 I wonder her haughty old lips didn't blister ;  
 Half-smothered her jugged hare with jelly and mustard,  
 And deluged her apricot-pudding with custard ;  
     And after 'twas done,  
     Seeming full of her fun,  
 Said, ' My dear, before you in the arms of your lover lie,  
     For the sake of digestion  
     Accept this suggestion,  
 That we wind up the day with Sir Roger de Coverley.'  
 And yet all the time in a deuce of a fidget  
 Was that wretched old Abigail Deborah Bridget.

About half-past twelve or a quarter to one,  
 When the dancing and music and laughter were done,  
 Up to her dressing-room went poor May,  
 And rang for her ' nightcap'—her usual way :  
 Said nightcap was not made of muslin—i' figs !  
     Not made of muslin  
     Or anything puzzling,  
     But intended for guzzling—  
 A mixture of claret and nutmeg and eggs :  
 It came when she rang, in a big silver cup,  
 By Abigail Deborah Bridget brought up.

Wicked old traitress  
To act as a waitress,  
Coming up with a countenance smiling and placid,  
Though she'd tempered the claret with strong prussic acid ;  
Her kindness a series of false-hearted crams,  
For there was the poison, four death-giving drachms ;  
Quite enough for poor Mabel, the Vicar's dear bride,  
Who drank it, looked wild for a moment, and—died !

The Reverend Harry went mad in a day,  
And to the asylum was taken away :  
The horrid old witch  
Should have died in a ditch.  
They certainly ought to have hanged her—but no,  
The matter was carefully hushed up, and so  
My sweet sister Mabel has never lain still  
In her grassy grave on the churchyard hill.

And this is the tale of the Vicarage Ghost,  
Which many have seen, which has frightened most.  
About half an hour after midnight still  
You may hear her dressing-room bell sound shrill ;  
And if you go up, which ere now has been done—  
By some for bravado, by others for fun—  
There Mabel stands,  
With the cup in her hands,  
And again the terrible nightcap drinks,  
In a thin chemisette,  
With long ringlets of jet,  
And her countenance set  
As I ne'er shall forget ;  
And after a while from your sight she sinks,  
And you hear her utter—  
Half sigh, half mutter—  
'Why am I doomed to wander unblest ?  
Revenge alone can give me rest !'

This was the end of the old woman's tale,  
Which made Harry and Frank look excessively pale,  
And kept them awake the whole of the night,  
Shivering, trembling, perspiring with fright :  
For they fancied they heard as they lay in the bed  
Beautiful Mabel's mouse-like tread,  
Or saw in the gloom of the dusky night  
That thin chemisette of so ghastly a white !  
And for years thereafter  
They owned with laughter,  
They stood transfixed with a shuddering spell  
When they heard the sound of the dressing-room bell.

Well—well ;  
Now I've to tell  
What befell,

When Harry and Frank thought fit to expel  
 All belief about ghosts from their sapient crania,  
 And to say 'twas the frosty-faced crone's monomania :  
 Which some time after they did, as it seems,  
 Having rowed upon Isis' classical streams,  
     Eaten oysters for lunch,  
     Drunk whisky-punch,  
 Driven many a drag on the Oxford roads,  
 And boggled awhile at the Choral Odes.  
     What befell  
     I'm pleased to tell,  
 When they watched for the sound of the dressing-room bell.

## FYTTE IV.

The Long Vacation was half-way through,  
 And Frank and Harry had nothing to do,  
 And found it slow—and so would you.  
 One was getting up law, and the other divinity,  
 In the jolly old classical halls of Trinity.  
 Now Frank, whose brain was of crotchets prolific,  
 Had become excessively scientific ;  
 He divided the clouds into nimbi and cumuli,  
 Was fond of a bore into dusty old tumuli ;  
 Had a room in the house which he called a thesaurus,  
     Where he stored up snugly  
     Full many an ugly  
 Megatherium, mastodon, plesiosaurus ;  
     And twice a week,  
     'Stead of studying Greek,  
 He got up a *séance mesmérrique* !  
 And, much to his governor's holy annoyance,  
 Exhibited coma, and sometimes clairvoyance.  
     Was an archæologist,  
     A crack geologist,  
     A meteorologist,  
     A prime conchologist,  
     An entomologist,  
     An ornithologist,  
     A rare zoologist,  
     A neurhypnologist,  
     An amphibologist,  
 And everything else that ends in 'ologist' !  
 And you'll guess, with such cart-loads of learning to boast,  
 He was hardly the chap to believe in a ghost.

'Twas very nearly the murk midnight,  
 And the fire was roaring merry and bright,  
 While Frank with a lens was examining stones  
     Which the deluge had left  
     In some cranny or cleft ;  
 His brother was hard at work—devilling bones.



On the table a grouse and some whisky-punch, and which is  
Better than any  
Hill-dew from Kilkenny ;  
A magnum of claret, with anchovy sandwiches.  
They had fixed that night to annihilate fable  
Concerning the nocturnal rambles of Mabel.

Like fellows of nous  
They finished the grouse ;  
They grew rather frisky  
Over the whisky ;  
And defied any ghost that e'er haunted a garret  
By the time they arrived at the last glass of claret.  
But even while they laughed and sang  
The dressing-room bell most suddenly rang.  
It gave them a fright,  
Which sobered them quite,  
And ended their fun, and their frolic and raillery—  
Seizing candles, they both bolted out in the gallery.

The dressing-room door was opened wide,  
And they saw very plainly the phantom bride ;  
From a silver cup  
She was drinking up  
Poisonous draughts in a ruby tide.  
O, exceedingly light was her thin chemisette ;  
O, exceedingly dark were her tresses of jet ;  
Her neat little foot—  
Without slipper, or boot,  
Or stocking—peeped out from her petticoat slyly :  
And though people mostly  
Prefer what's not ghostly,  
The dear little spectre delighted them highly ;  
And Harry exclaimed, in a deuce of a heat,  
' By Jove, you're a regular charmer, my sweet !'

'Twasn't said  
Ere her sweetness fled,  
And she sprang through the door with a shriek of dread.  
Off went Harry, and off went his brother ;  
One through one door, and one through another.  
What in the world could ever be horridier  
Than to run from a ghost through chamber and corridor ?

Fleeter, fleeter  
Than is my metre,  
Mabel chased the two collegians  
From the upper rooms to the lower regions.  
Out went Frank, and out went his brother ;  
One through one window, one through another ;  
Mabel after,  
With ghostly laughter  
That echoed in every vicarage rafter ;

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And she chased them far through the lampless streets,  
 And away from the town,  
 Up hill and down,  
 By villages, cottages, gentlemen's seats,  
 And they didn't pull up till the morn came to end all,  
 A mile and a half or so t'other side Kendal,  
 Where the crow of a jolly farmhouse chanticleer  
 Was the signal for Mabel to bolt—disappear.

This is a fact,  
 A narration exact,  
 Of what ancient, veracious historians say :  
 Excessively ill was Frank next day,  
 Though an F.R.S. and an F.S.A.,  
 His doubtings were utterly taken away.  
 But Harry, less wise,  
 Said ghosts were guys,  
 And hazarded many a wild surmise  
 Concerning the one that gave them such a 'rise :'  
*E.g.* among other fantastical twirls,  
 He used to declare  
 That this spectre so fair  
 Was one of his brother's somnambulist girls !

But there's this the whole truth of the tale to evince—  
 The Vicarage Ghost has ne'er been seen since.  
 I presume that the fact is,  
 She wasn't in practice  
 For running ; and scampered so far on their track,  
 That it made her a great deal too tired to come back.

YE MORALLE.

If you cultivate fun, if you cultivate science,  
 You should never much meddle with people from Hades.  
 Don't set all the spiritual world at defiance ;  
 Don't drink too much whisky, don't mesmerise ladies.

Archæologise, botanise, grope and geologise—  
 Such matters yield very legitimate joyance ;  
 But (for giving good counsel I never apologise)  
 Don't patronise thin chemisettes and clairvoyance.

## MRS. BROWN'S GHOST-STORY.

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IF anyone was to say to me, 'Mrs. Brown, do you believe in ghosts, mum?' I should say, 'That depends on circumstances;' for I'm sure, if ever there was a woman as I'd take the word on, it's Mrs. Padwick, as is a blood-relation by the mother's side; and I'm sure, to 'ear 'er tell about the ghost as 'er and Padwick saw when on their weddin' tower, as they took quite genteel, thro' 'im bein' well-to-do, by the St. Alban's coach, as took 'em up at the Peacock at Islington, as is close agin the Angel, where the mail-coaches did used to start from, a-blowin' their horns, in bran-new liveries on the king's birthday, as shows the flight of time, thro' 'im a-dyin' in '30, as was well on in years, and railroads 'avin' run the mail-coaches off the road.

Not as ever Mrs. Padwick was one to talk about it, and wouldn't preaps never 'ave mentioned it agin only thro' me a-settin' up late with her one night, three winters ago, with a 'eavy cold on 'er chest, as I thought would 'ave turned to jaunders, for 'er eyes was yokes of eggs for yellerness, with a pain between the blade-bones like a carvin'-knife drove thro' you unawares.

Well, we was a-'avin' of a chat together over all manner; leastways, she was in bed a-settin' up, with a shawl round 'er shoulders thro' 'avin' 'ad for supper arrer-root made with water and a little brandy in it, with a bit of thin dry toast, as wouldn't lay 'eavy on the constitution.

I'd took my supper on a little table near the fire, as was a bit of cold griskin, and a little somethink 'ot, thro' the beer a strikin' chilly, tho' only 'arf a pint, as is my allowance at night.

She says to me all of a sudden, 'Why, Martha, it's over forty years since I was married, as my weddin'-day were the day before yesterday; and if this ain't the werry night as me and Padwick see the ghost as 'aunted the 'ouse where we was a-stoppin', thro' bein' snowed-up.'

I says, 'Go along with your rubbish, as is all impositions, the same as the Cock-lane ghost, as my dear mother remembered well, tho' I must say as in course such things might be, thro' it bein' well known as Lady Marley's ghost was seen to walk every night thro' Cocker-ton churchyard, and strangled the beadle in 'is cock-'at, as were a-watchin' for 'er in the porch, thro' not a-likin' to be pryed into, as no lady wouldn't in 'er grave-clothes.'

Says Mrs. Padwick, 'Don't jeer nor jest, Martha Brown, at ghosts as is disembowelled sperrits, and may be judgments on us, for what we knows.'

I says, 'Mary Ann Padwick, I ain't one to do it, thro' a-believin' in sperrits.'

She says, 'I'm glad to 'ear it, for I've see a ghost with my own eyes as white as your nightcap-border.'

I says, 'You don't say so!'

She says, 'I do, and so did Pad-



wick, as wasn't no religion, tho' brought up a Quaker, as he never stuck to; but must say nothing could not 'ave been more aperient to the naked eye than that ghost as come into our room at the old 'ouse belonging to Padwick's uncle on the Luton road, as 'ad been millers, father and son, time out of mind.

'We'd only been man and wife three days when we see it, and was a-stoppin' at the old 'ouse, as were a ramshackle sort of a place, and smelt damp and mouldy, and of all the dismal 'oles it was that bedroom, as even a fire didn't seem to cheer up.

'We'd been abed ever so long, when I started up sudden thro' 'earin' a noise; and if there wasn't a man a-settin' by the fire, as I can see 'is face now! for it was partly turned towards me; and as I'm a sinful woman, if 'is throat wasn't cut from ear to ear!

'I give such a yell as woke up Padwick, and he see 'im too, tho' warnished in a instant like smoke, as in course they will do thro' not a-likin' daylight to break on 'em. I was up in a instant, tho' pitch dark, and couldn't rest in that 'ouse, and set off by eight o'clock, tho' the snow were on the ground, and drove back to town in a tilt-cart, and never knowed till years arter as that room were reg'lar 'aunted, thro' the old miller, as were Padwick's father's uncle by the father's side, and did used to live in that 'ouse, 'avin' of 'is throat cut in that werry room in the dead of the night, and his own son's always thought to 'ave a 'and in it, and never 'eard on no more; but brought in suicide by the inquest as set upon him, and buried in a cross-road, as is the reason he can't rest in 'is grave, tho' a stake thro' the body to keep him down; and that's 'ow the property come to Padwick's uncle.'

Not as any ghost need 'ave come a-troublin' 'er nor Padwick, for I'm sure they never got a farthing of the money; and as to the night's lodgin', one wouldn't think as no ghost would be that mean to begrudge it to anybody; as is reg'lar dog in the manger, as the sayin' is; but certingly werry awful not to be buried decent, as is what a cross-road and a stake cannot be called; though I must say as I do not 'old with them symetries, as ain't like a reg'lar churchyard, with a tombstone and railin's, or even a grave turfed up decent, as is a thing as we all looks forward to natural; and I'm sure poor Mrs. Whelan slaved her life out to pay up 'er burial-club; and then to be swindled out on it by that old waggon-bone Macorliff, as bolted with the deposits and left 'em all to die unburied; or the parish, as is never decent, dead or alive.

I says, 'Lor', you don't say so!'

Jest then she give a snore, and I see as she were a-droppin' off, and felt that uncommon chilly thro' 'earin' of that ghost, I thought as I'd 'ave a little drop more of something as 'ot as I could drink it, and looks round at the fire; and if it wasn't werry near dead out, and not a bit of wood in the room, thro' that gal 'avin' forgot to put it in scuttle the last thing, as I'd told 'er to.

It was 'owlin' wind and bitter cold, and I knowed as the coal-cellar was kep in the back-yard; but felt as I must go and get a bit; and jest then Mrs. Padwick wakes up and says as she'd got a chill, and spoke quite sharp about me a-lettin' out the fire, as she must 'ave a fire.

So down I goes, with my work (as were a flannin petticoat as I'd been a 'errin'-bonin') over my 'ead, for to get the wood, as I didn't 'arf like the job, partikler arter talkin' about them ghosts, as made cold

water run down my back ; for I'd 'eard say as old Chandlers, as did used to live in that werry 'ouse, 'ad 'ung 'isself behind the back-kitchen door to the jack-towel roller, as is a awful end for anyone.

I'd jest got the back-door open, and when I remembered as I'd forgot the coalscuttle as was werry low, so goes up to get it; and as I come down agin the back-door flowed open wide without me a-touchin' it, and if somethink white didn't fly slap in my face as struck as cold as death, and knocked me back-'ards.

I give a scream, and down I fell, droppin' the candle and coalscuttle and all ; and then I rushes like mad up to Mrs. Padwick's room, as come a-rushin' out and give me a shove back'ards all down the stairs agin, and double-locked the door in my face, a-thinkin' I was thieves, as woke up the gal, and down she come a-hollerin', and tumbled over me in the dark a-layin' on the stairs, as she pretty nigh stomped to death, as 'ave a 'eavy tread.

I says, 'Susan, it's me as 'ave see a ghost.'

Their words set 'er off a-yellin' frightful.

I says, 'Be quiet, or you'll be your missus's death, as I did not wish no 'arm too, tho' it was a unfeelin' act for to lock the door, let alone knockin' me backard as she didn't go to do.'

It was as much as ever I could do to quiet that gal, when I 'eard a step a-comin' upstairs stealthy-like. I thought it was all over with us both, but 'ushed that gal as was crouched up with me on the landin'; and 'eard the footsteps a-comin', and a-comin', and all of a sudden there was a flash of light in both our eyes.

I 'ad 'ardly no breath in me, but the presence of mind for to say, 'Who's there?' as answered, 'What's the doors open for?' and

proved to be the perliceman as 'ad found the back-door open ; and glad I was to see 'im, as went and got the wood and coals for us, and thro' givin' 'im a glass of sperits. When Mrs. Padwick unlocked the door, as I 'ad to beg and pray on 'er to thro' the key-'ole ever so long, and do believe as she'd 'ave 'ad a illness as would 'ave took us both off, only I made 'er some more arrer-root, and give even that gal a drop of somethink 'ot as was all shivers ; and 'ours afore I got to sleep, and must say as I do think as it must 'ave been somethink out of nature as come slap in my face, tho' the perliceman said as it must 'ave been the gal's stockin's as she left 'angin' out, and the wind blowed in my face ; not as I were a-goin' to argue with a ignorant young man like that as said he didn't think as I should see anythink much wuss than myself if I was to go a long way, as was werry insultin', tho', preaps, without my 'air I may look strange in my nightcap, as makes a deal of difference to the 'uman 'ead ; but do believe, as that perliceman 'ad 'ad somethink afore I give 'im that drop, for if he didn't put 'is back agin' the wall and larf like foolish when I was a -tellin' 'im about that ghost, as shows as he 'adn't no manners nor yet feelin's ; for when I said as that gal 'ad trod wiolent on my nose a-rushin' downstairs with 'er bare 'oofs, he larfed wuss than ever ; and as to Mrs. Padwick, whether it was that ghost, or what it was, I don't know, but she was dreadful bad in the mornin' ; and as to my 'ead, I thought bust it would ; and what I thought bad in that perliceman was 'is a -drainin' that brandy-bottle, as he must 'ave done when we wasn't a-lookin', for there wasn't a drop in it next mornin', and I only drewed with my own 'ands, and broke the neck off with givin'

of it a twist. But I must say, as in course no one as aint a 'ebrew Jew nor yet a 'eathen Turk couldn't but believe in 'em; and as to Jews, I'm sure poor Mrs. Israel's aunt, as good a soul as ever broke bread, put her 'ip out in Bonner's Fields, 'Ackney, thro' some boys a frightenin' 'er with a lantern and a sheet, a-comin' 'ome with a 'eavy load, as shows she believed in ghosts, and 'ad cause to, with a limp to 'er dyin' day, as was a drawback to a purchasin' gentlefolks' wardrobes, as she were not above bein' seen a carryin', nor yet cut-glass jugs as was blowed like crystial, and lovely fruit done in wax as looked that temptin' as made your mouth water, as the sayin' is. But if I was to set up for ever with Mrs. Padwick you wouldn't never ketch me a-listenin' to none of 'er ghost, as is a solemn subject, and did ought to be laid with 'oly water reg'lar, as I've 'eard tell, in the Dead Sea, as is the place for 'em to be at rest in, and not bother parties as never did 'em no 'arm, livin' nor dead, and not like the resurrection men as did used to be about when I was

a gal, and known for to rob the departed, tho' quite as well for that lady as they'd been and buried alive in 'er rings, as was brought to life thro' the feller as 'ad broke into 'er coffin a-sawin' at her finger, as brought the life back into 'er, thro' that ring bein' swelled, leastways the finger, and grasped 'im tight, and 'eld 'im till 'er cries brought 'elp, as lived to be a great-grand-mother; all the waggerbones 'ung, as served 'em right, for a-disturbin' the dead, as did ought to be let alone in their silent tombs; but, for all that, will sometimes take to walkin', and often apparitions to them as is born at midnight, as Mrs. Preedy's twins was, and a mercy they was took, for, dreadful objects! they might 'ave been 'aunted to their dyin' day, as would 'ave been werry unpleasant to their mother's sister as 'ad the care on them for the month, and died within a week when not nine days old, so aint likely to be troubled with no ghosts in this world, and never shall 'ear twelve o'clock strike, and not think of them, and ghosts into the bargain.

## FALCONEST.

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WE were all rather surprised at Linda's sudden marriage; and yet she could scarcely have hoped to do so well, as the world counts doing well. A penniless German girl, without status here or a home in her own country, it was surely a piece of supreme good luck that such a man as Lewis Falconer should take a fancy to her and make her his wife, before she had fully realised the desolateness of her own position. Certainly Lewis Falconer was no favourite with us at Stretton, though we could not have said why; for he was rich, handsome, and well bred; and yet, what was it that made us all dislike him so intensely? and that made us schoolgirls at Mrs. Waring's more than dislike, even fear him? There was nothing in his appearance to warrant this dread of ours, and yet I verily believe not one of us would have stayed with him alone for five minutes.

I hated him as much as anyone did, and was as much afraid of him as anyone was, but I could not explain it to myself. He was the very reverse of a typical ruffian, being a slightly-built, rather undersized, fair-haired man, with singularly small white hands, of which he was very proud, and a perpetual smile on his loose and over-red lips. Perhaps it was because his lips were so over-red—I remember Hetty Lane always said they reminded her of a vampire's—or because his smile was so perpetual

and yet so cold, showing those two long white teeth of his, shaped just like a rat's; perhaps it was because his eyes were of such a strange light-green hazel colour, set so deeply under his brows, and never looking straight into yours. I do not know; it might have been because of one, or all, or none of these things; for schoolgirls are strange creatures, with quite irrational instincts and antipathies; I only know the fact that we all hated him, and were all in deadly fear of him if ever by chance we had to speak to him. And yet he was handsome; indeed, some people called him one of the handsomest young men in the country. The brow was broad, if low; the nose fine and high—he used to call it 'the true falcon beak,' and so it was; the fair hair fell picturesquely about the sleek and pallid face; but, there it was: the expression was cruel, the well-bred manner masked one unending sneer, and his very admiration for us girls—and he professed a great admiration for us all—was more an expression of superiority than of affection. He treated us all—save his cousin, Eva Fairlie—as mere pretty playthings, utterly inferior to himself, and as if we ought to be grateful for his condescension when he noticed us. And this was just the kind of thing to annoy a set of schoolgirls whose heads were full of Mario, and the lovers one meets with in novels, and to whom the barber's-block



kind of man is the ideal to be longed for.

Still papa, though he confessed that he 'did not quite like him somehow,' always said that he was a first-rate match for Linda; and mamma declared he 'was very nice and gentlemanlike, and that she was sure Linda would never have such another offer, and that it would save her a great deal of knocking about and humiliation if she got settled now at once, and so she had better take the goods the gods had provided her, and become Mrs. Falconer without delay.' I was always against the match, but I had no reason to give; and Linda, in her quiet, indifferent way, said, 'Very well; perhaps to be mistress of Falconest was better than being governess at the Grange, under the eye of that dreadful Mrs. Tidey, who had asked her to go there at twenty pounds a-year, and six children to look after.' So Linda and Lewis Falconer were engaged and going to be married, all in a minute as it seemed to us; and heartily sorry I was at the idea of losing the quiet, placid girl, who, though she was perhaps a little heavy and German, was as good as gold and as true as steel. And when a girl marries a man one does not like, one does lose her; even if as intimate as I was with Linda. We were almost like sisters together; we were exactly of the same age, and had been class-mates and room-mates at school for the last four years, and so had got to be very near and dear to each other. Besides, we what papa called supplemented and corrected each other. Linda's placidity checked my more impatient temper, and perhaps my rampageousness — papa's word — roused Linda out of something that might have sunk into apathy if she had been quite left to herself. At all events, we got on

together most beautifully; and I can safely say, in all our lives had never had one single word of quarrel or misunderstanding.

We were sitting together in her room at Falconest, the night before her marriage, brushing our hair by the fire. Linda was proud of her hair, and she had reason to be so. It was the real German hair, *blonde cendrée*, with no red in it, but just a shimmer of gold to lift up the ashen hue, and take it out of insipidity; and it was long, thick, and silky. There was not the faintest ripple in it, but it fell in a heavy kind of cascade when she let it down, that in itself was a beauty. As she sat now, negligently drawing her comb through the long masses flowing over her shoulders, she made a pretty picture, with the firelight gleaming on her, and touching her white face with a ruddier tint, as it flickered and fell. I could not help thinking what a contrast there was between us: I, with my short, boy-cut, curly black hair, my turned-up nose, and dark-brown eyes as big as saucers; and Linda with her bleached face and mild gray eyes, her indolence of attitude, and the patient kind of melancholy that was in every line and turn of her face and figure. I was sitting on a low stool, resting my clasped hands on the arm of her chair, and trying to read her thoughts in her face as she leaned dreamily back, drawing out those thick skeins of yellow silk of hers, as if she did not know what she was doing. After a long spell of silence she said, answering my looks: 'I think I shall be happy, Chrissy; I do not see why not.'

I did not know much about such things, but I thought if I had been going to be married, I should have liked to have been able to say something more decided than this, and in a different tone too.

'I hope you will, Linda,' I answered. 'I don't suppose you would marry Mr. Falconer at all if you did not think he loved you, and would do all he could to make you happy.'

'Well, you know, Chrissy, we Germans do not look for so much devotion as you Englishwomen do; and if Mr. Falconer will be satisfied with me, that is all I shall ask.'

'That is being very humble and self-denying, Linda,' I said hurriedly; the humility of her words and manner pained me more than I could express. 'I don't think I should ever consider myself so much my husband's inferior, so entirely his property, as to be thankful if only he was such a lenient master as to be satisfied with me.'

She smiled. How well I remember that smile! It was one of those sudden, transient revelations of a deeper nature which leave their mark for life upon one's memory.

'Ah, but remember, Chrissy,' she said very slowly, and she looked down while she spoke, 'I am nobody. Even a wife can feel that she is a pauper and living on her husband's charity; and what am I but a pauper to Mr. Falconer?'

'Don't say such things, Linda!' I cried; 'you ought to have more self-respect than to even think such dreadful things. Pauper indeed! With all his money, and his fine house, you are just too good for Lewis Falconer, and that is the simple truth.'

'Dear Chrissy,' Linda answered, stooping down her head and kissing me; and I remember to this hour the feel of her soft, scented hair as it fell over my face and on to my neck; 'it is not my fault if I have so little self-respect, as you call it—pride, as I should call it. When one has nothing to boast of

in one's circumstances, it is hard to put much value on one's person. Do you know, Chrissy,' she went on to say, 'I have never been able to understand why Mr. Falconer wanted to marry me at all?' She lowered her voice and looked anxiously into my face. 'Don't you remember, only two months ago, how much in love we all thought he was with his cousin Eva Fairlie, and how surprised we were when she went away so suddenly, and he told us, when your father asked after her, that he did not know where she had gone, and that he supposed the next thing we should hear of her would be that she had married an Italian count? And then all at once he turned to me, and has made me marry him in such a hurry—me, of all people in the world!—for there were never two girls more utterly unlike than Eva and I. And you remember, don't you, how she used to hate me? I sometimes think—isn't it wicked of me, Chrissy?—that if Eva were to come back, Mr. Falconer might repent having married me, and fall in love with her again; and when I think that, I feel that it would be better for me to say "No" at once—"No" at the last moment, in the very church itself, and with the ring on my finger.'

She shuddered as she spoke, as if she was cold; and I, too, suddenly felt a strange wind pass over us. I do not know where it came from. No window was open; the fire was burning brightly in the wide hearth; and yet an icy stream of air seemed to flow all about us, and chilled me to the very bone.

'What an awfully cold night!' I said, shivering.

Just then the wind rose into a wild howl, and shook the branches of the yews and cedars outside as if a living thing had got hold of them. It made the old tapestry on the walls of the room where we

were wave and flutter till the huge, pale figures looked alive: it was a blast so wild and sudden it seemed to shake the whole house from roof to flooring, and the moan of it was like something in great pain.

'O Linda, what a horrid place this Falconest is!' I said again, I am afraid a little petulantly, as I stirred away at the wood-fire furiously, and sent a crowd of sparks up into the blackness.

What fantastic things shadows and flame-light make together! There, as I sat looking at Linda, I distinctly saw the dusky outline of a long and slender hand steal round her throat; and, I suppose it was from a sudden vivid flame, all her long fair hair was dyed a deep blood-red.

'Linda, what is that?' I cried.

'What?' she said, startled.

'There! that red stain! Linda, what is it? there, on your hair!'

'On my hair? red stain? Nothing, Chrissy,' she answered, taking up the heavy mass in her hand. And at that moment the flame went out, and only the diffused light of the embers fell on the blonde head, and the fair face and throat were again undarkened by shadow and unstained by blood.

It was a horrible fantasy for the moment, and I felt almost sick with nameless terror. Linda too looked scared, and once or twice glanced round the large dark chamber, putting her hand to her throat and chest as if in pain.

'We have sat up till we are both nervous,' I said, trying to speak lightly; but somehow my voice would only come hoarse and rough. 'The best thing we can do now is to go to bed. Hush! what is that? Linda, who is it?'

'God protect me!' cried Linda, clinging to me in terror; 'that is Mr. Falconer's step. He is coming for me!'

And as I live we both heard a

man's footfall through the room — a slow, heavy step, that seemed to walk as if under a weight, passing from the fireplace where we sat to the door; and as it passed a shuddering, moaning kind of sigh went with it, and the drip, drip, of something falling on the black oak floor.

'O Linda, do not marry Mr. Falconer!' I said excitedly; 'come back with us to-morrow, and break off this horrible marriage. Do not live at Falconest; it is a God-forgotten place, Linda; it is full of crime and suffering!'

'I must marry him,' sobbed poor Linda wildly; 'and he terrifies me so much, Chrissy; I cannot tell you what he makes me feel. I don't want to marry him, I never have wanted; but he makes me.'

'Then you shall not, Linda,' I said; 'you shall come back with us to Stretton to-morrow, and you shall live with us, and not go out as a governess at all. Linda dear, you shall not be sacrificed to this man.'

As I said this a little, light, mocking laugh sounded just at my side. It was Lewis Falconer's laugh, but he himself was nowhere to be seen. The sound seemed to recall Linda to herself. Pushing back her hair, she suddenly composed herself — I never saw anything so sudden — and looked at me with an anxious expression in her face.

'I have been talking nonsense, Chrissy dear,' she said slowly. 'We have both frightened ourselves to death in this dreary, rat-haunted old place. You know what odd noises the wind and the rats make in an old house; but when the place has been thoroughly aired and brushed up, we shall have no more ghosts to frighten us. Come, let us go to bed before we get quite foolish. This is the last time we shall see each other, Chrissy, for perhaps a long while.'

She kissed me as she spoke ; but though she tried to seem so calm, I felt her poor heart beat violently against mine, and I brushed off some tears with my lips when I kissed her cold face. As for me, I was sobbing passionately, and it was long before I fell asleep ; but at last I did, and did not awake until Mary the housemaid called us in the morning, smirking as she brought Linda a lovely bridal bouquet which her husband-elect had sent her.

It may seem strange that we were in Mr. Falconer's house before the wedding, but that was his wish. Papa and mamma had wanted to give Linda away from Stretton, our own house ; but Mr. Falconer would not hear of it. He had a fancy, he said, that the marriage should take place at Falconest, in the private chapel belonging to the house, and that the world should see his bride as she was—his without the intervention of friends, or the advantage of dower of any kind. He insisted on giving her the whole of her *trousseau* ; and nothing would dissuade him. It was his liking, he said, with that horrid smile of his on his red mouth ; and as it was a liking that cost no one but himself anything, he thought he might be allowed to indulge it. He would not allow Linda to possess a gown or a bonnet that he had not paid for ; and he insisted that, on the morning of her marriage, everything hitherto belonging to her should be given away or burnt. He endowed her very well, that I must confess ; but I think I would have sooner died than have submitted to this kind of insolent generosity. I would rather have begged my bread than have been taken as Linda was—more like a slave-girl who had been bought for so much than as a free Christian maiden who honoured the man to whom she gave herself.

But for all that, I would not let her call herself a pauper. My father and mother were dreadfully annoyed at the whole thing ; but what could mere friends, as we were, do against the determined will of such a man as Lewis Falconer, helped as it was by that kind of passive obedience, that yielding indifferentism, which belonged to Linda's character ? She was nobody's care ; she was her own mistress entirely ; and if she chose to obey Lewis Falconer, and to do as he desired, no one on earth could prevent her.

So this was how it had come about that we had been sitting by the fire in a room at Falconest on the eve of the marriage, frightening ourselves to death with what Linda called rats.

The morning broke gray and cloudy, and presently large flakes of snow began to fall. But that was not of much consequence ; the chapel was within the walls of the old house, and there was to be no bridal tour for the young people. After the breakfast we, the only guests and friends invited—that is, I and my father and mother—would drive home ; and we were people who did not care for weather, and never made a fuss about trifles.

Linda looked very lovely at the wedding—a little too pale, perhaps ; but then brides ought to look pale, I believe. She was beautifully dressed, for Mr. Falconer had exquisite taste ; and her lace, flowers, ornaments, and whole attire were just perfect. The opals round her throat were really something to see ; but how red the colour of them ! They showed no other colour as the light struck through them but fiery red. But they were magnificent stones, and must have been worth a fortune in themselves. And yet, poor Linda ! I could not help pitying her in my



heart, though it seemed so stupid to pity a girl for being married to a smiling, rich, and handsome man. How I wished he would not smile so much! That cruel mouth of his; those dreadful long white rat's teeth; and yet he was so handsome, and bore his part with such wonderful grace and ease. How I wished I could have liked him better!

Suddenly, just as the ring had been placed on her finger, the oaths taken, and the clergyman had pronounced the irrevocable words which bound them until death should part them, the chapel door creaked noisily on its hinges, and a tall girl dressed in deep mourning stood within the opening. It was Eva Fairlie, Lewis Falconer's cousin.

I do not think I ever saw a more beautiful girl than Eva, or one that impressed one with a stronger sense of life and power. She was a girl who, without being large or stout, dwarfed and impoverished everyone who came near her. She had improved since we last saw her. That was one of her peculiarities; she always seemed to have improved during an absence. Beautiful as she was to think of, she was always more beautiful in the reality than in memory; and whatever her dress, it was just that which most became her. She was lovely in colours; in her heavy mourning she was sublime. And yet, as with Lewis Falconer, there was something about her that spoiled all her beauty—something that one could not love, and that one could not help fearing. She had been in Italy for the last two months, and she seemed to have brought back some of the Italian sun on her peachy cheeks; and as she stood there, contrasting with Linda, so fair and colourless, she made her look faded and insipid. There is some kind of beauty that seems to

poison every other; and Eva's was of this kind.

At the sound of the creaking door, Lewis looked round rather angrily. When he saw who it was, he dropped Linda's hand quite suddenly; no, he did not drop it—he flung it away, and a strange half-groan, half-curse, burst from his lips. We were all scared, of course; but Eva, as if it was quite the most natural thing in the world, glided in gracefully and took her place by the side of the bride; and as she stood the sun came out for just one of those brief and almost fierce flashes one sometimes sees in a winter's day, and threw the colours of the painted window right over the wedding group. A line of purplish red caught Linda's floating hair and crossed her breast; it touched her husband's hand as he stood with his right hand clasping the upper part of his left arm; and then it spread out into a broad stain at his feet—a very pool of blood-red colour lying on the stone pavement.

I cannot tell what sick madness seized me, but it seemed to me I heard the same heavy footstep that I had heard last night—slow and staggering as if under a weight—and the same pitiful sigh accompanying it, with the drip, drip, as of water falling on the stones. I started and stared about me, but there was nothing; only the dark and dreary recesses of the chapel, the coloured shadow of the window, and by the altar the small bridal group, with the purple pool made by the robe of some martyred saint dyeing the stones at Lewis Falconer's feet; only the pallid, white-robed bride, and the lovely face of Eva Fairlie in her heavy mourning looking fixedly at her cousin.

Then the clouds gathered thick and heavy again, and the bride and bridegroom knelt for the last

prayer. When it was ended, Linda, whose face had been hidden in her hands as she crouched rather than knelt against the altar, was found to have fainted.

'Let Maria attend her,' said Lewis coldly. 'Come, Eva'—and he offered his arm to his cousin—'come into the dining-room and tell me why you are in mourning, and how you came here to-day—to-day of all the days in the year, and at such a moment,' he added bitterly.

I could not help hearing all this as I followed them slowly out of the chapel. Mamma would not let me stay with Linda as I had wished, so that I was obliged to follow them, and I could not help hearing them. They did not seem, either, to care to talk so that no one should hear them; they did not seem to care for anything, indeed, or to remember anything but each other.

'I came because poor mamma is dead,' said Eva, 'and because she left me to your care, cousin Lewis.'

'Left you to my care, Eva? Are you my own dear charge now?' asked Lewis, and I did not think he could have spoken with such tenderness.

'Yes,' said Eva; 'and I am so glad that I am, cousin Lewis, for I want to tell you how sorry I am for behaving so badly to you in the autumn, and I want to ask you to let us be friends again; I was going to say, to let us be as much friends as we were, but that is now impossible.' She sighed as she spoke, and yet her eyes looked more hard than loving; and though her speech was apparently simple enough, and spoken in a pretty coaxing accent, I felt that it was meant to torture, not to soothe—that it was the mere tantalising of a coquette, not the honesty of a lover.

'Eva!' groaned Lewis, 'why have you come to torture me? It is too late! My God! it is too late! and you have come to wring me with agony.'

'What is too late, dear Lewis?' she answered. 'It is never too late to do well. Quarrelling and dislike are such unchristian states to be in, and I want to be at peace with you both; with you because you are my dear, dear cousin and with—your wife'—she emphasised the word so that I saw Lewis blench as if she had struck him—'because she is your wife. We were not very good friends, I think, in old times, and I remember I used to think her heavy and impassive; but as your wife, dear Lewis—that makes all the difference, does it not? You must have found out something good in her—something very, very good to have made you forget poor little me so soon.'

The look of hatred and ferocious despair that came over Lewis Falconer's face made me shiver.

'My wife!—found such good in her as to have made me forget you! Eva, I think no tigress was ever crueller than you,' he groaned.

'Cruel, dear Lewis! Why? Why should I not call Linda your wife? Have I not just seen you married, with the opal necklace too'—and she laughed—'the very opal necklace you promised me? Are you afraid of words and not of things, Lewis?' she added, suddenly taking a quite different manner. 'Do you dare to do a thing and then shrink from speaking of it? Now, you see, I am not ashamed of putting words to my deeds. For instance, I am not ashamed to confess that I came here sorry for my misdeeds, and anxious to put things back to their old place; to ask you to let them go back; and I find you married! I came wanting to marry you, and

you are another woman's husband. That is terrible, you know, if you were to put it in plain language : but you won't. You would be afraid of labelling your actions as plainly as I dare do ; but that is just the difference between us, and it always was just the difference between us. You do and dare not label, and I do and label. Now you must go and look after your wife. I have told you all I wanted you to know ; but, as you are married, you must leave me and go and attend to Linda.'

Just then mamma called me, and I heard no more.

When the time for parting with poor Linda came, I do not think I ever went through such pain. What papa and mamma felt, I do not know ; but I felt as if I was leaving Linda to her death. Linda herself, too, looked so scared, so pale and terrified, so unlike her usual placid, indolent self, that it made one's heart ache to see her. She clung to us with a quite passionate abandonment, that made me cry and mamma sob ; and I saw even papa's lips quiver. Lewis and Eva stood looking on—so handsome, and yet so hateful as they both were ! How cruel they looked—like two beautiful devils ! The last we saw of them all was the pale, weeping bride standing apart in the bay-window, watching us as we drove away, while the two cousins were in a farther window arm-in-arm, talking together and laughing.

'I am so sorry we ever countenanced that marriage !' said papa, as soon as we had got into the carriage, speaking to mamma ; 'no good will come of it.'

'I am afraid that Mr. Falconer does not love the dear girl as she deserves,' said mamma ; 'but perhaps her good qualities will win him over in time.'

Mamma was one of those people

who always will exaggerate the hopeful side of things. She was sometimes almost irritating—dear mamma, what a shame of me to say so !—but indeed she was, with her determination never to see faults or objections, but only the good that did not exist. Papa said no more, and the rest of the journey was passed in silence.

We heard nothing of Linda for a long while, and then she wrote in answer to at least half-a-dozen notes of mine, saying that she had been ill ; that Eva was settled for good with them at Falconest, as she was an orphan now, like herself, and Mr. Falconer's ward (she did not call her husband by his Christian name yet) ; and that she was a great companion and amusement to Mr. Falconer, and made the time pass more pleasantly for him. What a strange thing for a wife to say ! She spoke very lovingly of us all, and of her happy school life, and dwelt on every little fact in a way that of itself showed she had no very pleasant circumstances to occupy her in the present ; for people never speak of the past so much, if they are happy in the present. I was not asked to go over to Falconest, as she had always promised I should be ; and she made no offer to come and see us. But a paragraph at the end of the letter struck me as explaining all :

'Mr. Falconer would send his remembrances, I am sure, if he knew that I was writing ; but he does not like my writing letters, he says, so I have not told him of this.'

'Ah, she should not deceive her husband !' said my mother gravely, when she read this paragraph.

Deceive him ! I think she was perfectly right to deceive him ! If those words did not mean that she was in utter slavery and thralldom, I wonder what else they meant !

Deceive him, indeed! I wish she had, or could! That is always the way with people: they are so very earnest that the victim shall be so upright and honourable to the tyrant! For my own part, I wish that Linda had got help and protection from her husband by any means whatever, honest or dishonest, candid or secret! What did it signify? Don't we set traps for vermin?

The night after I had had Linda's letter I could not sleep. I did not know what was the matter with me, but the whole room seemed to be full of some nameless terror—some awful horror; and though I did not hear, I seemed to feel—to be conscious of—sobs, and cries, and shrieks, far worse to bear than if one had heard them by the bodily sense. If I had dared, I would have got up and gone to mamma's room; but she had been very ill all the day, poor dear! and I did not like to disturb her for what was simple imagination and disordered nerves. But the horror drew nearer; the sobs and cries were thicker; it seemed to me that all manner of dreadful shapes and shadows flitted about; and at last I could bear it no longer. I felt I should have gone mad if I had stayed longer as I was, so I started up, and, going to the window, pulled up the blind and looked out. I felt the need of looking at something real, at something that I could not mistake. The moon was shining cold and bright on the leafless trees and frosty ground; but there was something in the look of everything that frightened me even more than I was already frightened. It was all so ghastly, so white, so desolate. As I stood there, I could have sworn that I saw things moving about the garden, while the trees and shrubs seemed to turn into horrid goblins, that tossed about

their skeleton arms, and bowed to me, and mocked at me.

Suddenly I heard a deep sigh behind me. There was no mistake this time—no mere fancy or trick of the imagination. I turned round, and there, in the full moonlight, stood Linda Falconer. She was all in white, as I had seen her on the night before her marriage, with her long fair hair streaming over her shoulders, but dyed and dripping with blood. She was ghastly pale, and neither moved nor spoke; only her sad eyes looked full into mine with a pathetic expression that went to my very heart.

'Linda, my own Linda!' I said aloud, and the sound of my own voice startled me. It was not like my voice somehow—it was like a hoarse loud shriek. It seemed to startle Linda too; for slowly, slowly, the form seemed to fade away, and only the moonlight poured coldly through the room. And then came the heavy man's step I had heard before, and a dusky shadow passed dimly across the moonlight, and with it a low sobbing and sighing, and the drip of something falling on the floor. And then all was dark, and I fell to the ground.

For some time after this I was very ill, in a high fever, and delirious; and this state lasted for many weeks. And after this came the long period of convalescence, for I mended but slowly; and so the winter had quite passed away and the spring had come when I recovered. I had often asked news of Linda, but I had never got any direct answer, save that she was well. I could not find that anyone had seen or heard of her, and I fancied that they put off my inquiries and never answered me fully. When I got quite well, I heard all there was to know. Falconest was deserted; the family



had suddenly left, and no one knew where they had gone. Their leaving had not been known in the neighbourhood at all until some time had elapsed, and when it was known there was no clue to be had as to Lewis Falconer's whereabouts.

I knew it all. It was of no use to reason with me, to try to pacify me, to put me off with arguments or excuses. My mind was set on one thing, and I was determined to find out the mystery of Falconest if I went alone to the search. At last I prevailed on my father to go over with a couple of men, and to take me with them. When we got there we found only one old woman, deaf and partly crazed, who had but one idea—that of keeping out intruders, and resolutely refusing to open gate or door. But by some adroitness that I did not quite catch, one of the men slipped through an unguarded entrance, and soon we all stood in the gloomy, dark, deserted hall of this hateful house—this God-forgotten house indeed.

Scarcely knowing what I did, or what I expected to see, I dragged papa to Linda's room, the room in which we had sat that last fatal night. The tapestry was torn, a broken chair lay on the floor, the bell-rope had been cut, and there were large rents in the curtains, as if some poor frantic hands had clutched at them for a momentary stay; there had evidently been an awful struggle, for broken fragments of all sorts of things were strewn about: among others, one

of Lewis Falconer's golden sleeve-links, and one of the opals of poor Linda's wedding necklace. And on the floor, where I picked these up, there was a deep, dark stain, as of dried red paint.

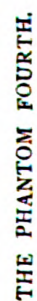
And from this stain went a narrow track of red all across the room to the door, upon which was the impress of a bloody hand that had opened it. We followed the stream, with every now and then the same mark of a bloody hand upon the wall, as if someone had steadied himself beneath a burden, until it brought us to the chapel, to where the sun shone through the crimson robe of the martyred saint, and threw down that broad ominous stain before the altar. A large flagstone had evidently been lately moved.

'She is there!' I whispered.

I remember that they tried to get me away, but that I shrieked and clung to the altar-rails. I felt bound to stay—bound to see it—to know and realise the worst. I saw the men slowly heave up the huge flagstone, and I stood, stiffened and strained, watching for what was to come. No; I cannot say it out. I should go mad again if I were to say in definite words either what I looked for or what was found. But as they heaved up the stone, I saw in one terrible glance the outline of a figure crushed down below, a white robe, a mass of flaxen hair, and a dark red stain crying out to Heaven for vengeance—as I cry out for vengeance now!









## THE PHANTOM FOURTH.

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THEY were three.

It was in the cheap night-service train from Paris to Calais that I first met them.

Railways, as a rule, are among the many things which they do *not* order better in France, and the French Northern line is one of the worst managed in the world, barring none, not even the Italian *vie ferrate*. I make it a rule, therefore, to punish the directors of, and the shareholders in, that undertaking to the utmost within my limited ability, by spending as little money on their line as I can help.

It was, then, in a third-class compartment of the train that I met the three.

Three as hearty, jolly-looking Saxon faces, with stalwart frames to match, as one would be likely to meet in an hour's walk from the Regent's-park to the Mansion House.

One of the three was dark, the other two were fair. The dark one was the senior of the party. He wore an incipient full beard, evidently in process of training, with a considerable amount of grizzle in it.

The face of one of his companions was graced with a magnificent flowing beard. The third of the party, a fair-haired youth of some twenty-three or four summers, showed a scrupulously smooth-shaven face.

They looked all three much flushed and slightly excited, and, I must say, they turned out the

most boisterous set of fellows I ever met.

They were clearly gentlemen, however, and men of education, with considerable linguistic acquirements; for they chatted and sang, and declaimed and 'did orations' all the way from Paris to Calais, in a slightly-bewildering variety of tongues.

Their jollity had, perhaps, just a little over-tinge of the slap-bang jolly-dog style in it; but there was so much heartiness and good-nature in all they said and in all they did, that it was quite impossible for any of the other occupants of the carriage to vote them a nuisance; and even the sourest of the officials, whom they chaffed most unmercifully and unremittingly at every station on the line, took their punishment with a shrug and a grin. The only person, indeed, who rose against them in indignant protestation was the head-waiter at the Calais-station refreshment-room, to whom they would persist in propounding puzzling problems, such as, for instance, 'If you charge two shillings for a one-and-a-half-ounce slice of breast of veal, how many fools will it take to buy the joint of you?'—and what *he* got by the attempt to stop their chaff was a caution to any other sinner who might have felt similarly inclined.

As for me, I could only give half my sense of hearing to their utterings, the other half being put under strict sequester at the time by my

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friend O'Kweene, the great Irish philosopher, who was delivering to me, for my own special behoof and benefit, a brilliant, albeit somewhat abstruse, dissertation on the 'visible and palpable outward manifestations of the inner consciousness of the soul in a trance;' which occupied all the time from Paris to Calais, full eight hours, and which, to judge from my feelings at the time, would certainly afford matter for three heavy volumes of reading in bed, in cases of inveterate sleeplessness—a hint to enterprising publishers.

My friend O'Kweene, who intended to stay a few days at Calais, took leave of me on the pier, and I went on board the steamer that was to carry us and the mail over to Dover.

Here I found our trio of the railway-car, snugly ensconced under an extemporised awning, artfully constructed with railway-rugs and greatcoats, supported partly against the luggage, and partly upon several oars, purloined from the boats, and turned into tent-poles for the nonce—which made the skipper swear woefully when he found it out some time after.

The three were even more cheery and boisterous on board than they had been on shore. From what I could make out in the dark, they were discussing the contents of divers bottles of liquor; I counted four dead men dropped quietly overboard by them in the course of the hour and a half we had to wait for the arrival of the mail-train, which was late, as usual on this line.

At last we were off, about half-past two o'clock in the morning. It was a beautiful clear moonlit night, so clear, indeed, that we could see the Dover lights almost from Calais harbour. But we had considerably more than a capful of wind, and there was a turgent ground-swell on, which made our

boat—double-engined, and as trim and tidy a craft as ever sped across the span from shore to shore—behave rather lively, with sportive indulgence in a brisk game of pitch-and-toss that proved anything but comfortable to most of the passengers.

When we were steaming out of Calais harbour, our three friends, emerging from beneath their tent, struck up in chorus Campbell's noble song, 'Ye Mariners of England,' finishing up with a stave from 'Rule, Britannia!'

But, alas for them! however loudly their throats were shouting forth the sway proverbially held by Albion and her sons over the waves, on this occasion at least the said waves seemed determined upon ruling these particular three Britons with a rod of antimony; for barely a few seconds after the last vibrating echoes of the 'Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!' had died away upon the wind, I beheld the three leaning lovingly together, in fast friendship linked, over the rail, conversing in deep ventriguttural accents with the denizens of Neptune's watery realm.

We had one of the quickest passages on record—ninety-three minutes' steaming carried us across from shore to shore. When we were just on the point of landing, I heard the dark senior of the party mutter to his companions, in a hollow whisper and mysterious manner, 'He is gone again;' to which the others, the bearded and the smooth-shaven, responded in the same way, with deep sighs of evident relief, 'Ay, marry! so he is at last.'

This mysterious communication roused my curiosity. Who was the party that was said to be gone at last? Where had he come from? where had he been hiding, that I had not seen him? and where was he gone to now? I determined to

know; if but the opportunity would offer, to screw, by cunning questioning, the secret out of either of the three.

Fate favoured my design.

For some inscrutable reason, known only to the company's officials, we cheap-trainers were not permitted to proceed on our journey to London along with the mail, but were left to kick our heels for some two hours at the Dover station.

I went into the refreshment-room to look for my party; I had a notion I should find them where the Briton's unswerving and unerring instinct would be most likely to lead them. It turned out that I was right in my conjecture. There they were, seated round a table, with huge bowls of steaming tea and monster piles of buttered toast and muffins spread on the festive board before them. Ay, indeed, there they were; but *quantum mutati ab illis!* how strangely changed from the noisy, rollicking set I had known them in the railway-car and on board the steamer, ere yet the demon of sea-sickness had claimed them for his own! How ghastly sober they looked now, to be sure! And how sternly and silently bent upon devoting themselves to the swilling of the Chinese shrub infusion and to the gorging of indigestible muffins. It was quite clear to me that it would have been worse than folly to venture upon addressing them whilst thus absorbed in absorbing. So I resolved to await a more favourable opening, and went out meanwhile to walk on the platform.

A short time I was left in solitary possession of the promenade; then I became suddenly aware that another traveller was treading the same ground with me—it was the dark elderly leader of the three. I glanced at him as he passed me under one of the lamps. He looked

pale and sad. The furrowed lines on his brow bespoke deliberation deep and pondering profound. All the infinite mirth of the preceding few hours had departed from him, leaving him but a wretched wreck of his former reckless self.

'A fine night, sir,' I said to break the ice,—'for the season of the year,' I added by way of a saving clause, to tone down the absoluteness of the assertion.

He looked at me abstractedly, merely reëchoing my own words, 'A fine night, sir, for the season of the year.'

'Why look ye so sad now, who were erst so jolly?' I bluntly asked, determined to force him into conversation.

'Ay, indeed, why so sad now?' he replied, looking me full in the face; then, suddenly clasping my arm with a spasmodic grip, he continued hurriedly, 'I think I had best confide our secret to you. You seem a man of thought. I witnessed and admired the patient attention with which you listened to your friend's abstruse talk in the railway-car. Maybe you can find the solution of a mystery which defies the ponderings of our poor brains—mine and my two friends.'

Then he proceeded to pour into my attentive ear this gruesome tale of mystery:

'We three—that is, myself, yon tall bearded Briton,' pointing to the glass door of the refreshment-room, 'whose name is Jack Hobson, and young Emmanuel Topp, junior partner in a great beer firm, whom you may behold now at his fifth bowl of tea and his seventh muffin—are teetotallers—'

'Teetotallers!' I could not help exclaiming. 'Lord bless me! that is certainly about the last thing I should have taken you for, either of you.'

'Well,' he replied with some slight confusion, 'at least, we *were*

*total teetotallers*, though I admit we can now only claim the character of partial abstainers. The fact is, when, about a fortnight ago, we were discussing the plan of our projected visit to the great Paris Exhibition, Topp suggested that whilst in France we should do as the French do, to which Jack Hobson assented, remarking that the French knew nothing about tea, and that a Frenchman's tea would be sure to prove an Englishman's poison. So we resolved to suspend the pledge during our visit to France.

'It was on the second day after our arrival in Paris. We were dining in a private cabinet at Désiré Beaurain's, one of the leading restaurants on the fashionable side of the Montmartre—Italiens Boulevard. Our dinner was what an Irishman might call a most "illigant" affair. We had sipped several bottles of Sauterne, and tasted a few of Tavel, and we were just topping the entertainment with a solitary bottle of champagne, when I became suddenly aware of the presence of another party in the room—a *fourth man*—who sat him down at our table, and helped himself liberally to our liquor. From what I ascertained afterwards from Jack Hobson and Emmanuel Topp, the intruder's presence became revealed to them also, either about the same time or a little later. What was he like? I cannot tell. His figure and face remained indistinct throughout—phantom-like. His features seemed endowed with a strange weird mobility that would defyingly elude the fixing grasp of our eager eyes. Now, and to my two companions, he would look marvellously like me; then, to me, he would stalk and rave about in the likeness of Jack Hobson; again, he would seem the counterfeit of Emmanuel Topp; then he would look like all the

three of us put together; then like neither of us, nor like anybody else. O, sir, it was a woful thing to be haunted by this phantom apparition. Yet the strangest part of the affair was that neither of us seemed to feel a whit surprised at the dread presence; that we quietly and uncomplainingly let him drink our wine, and actually give orders for more; that we never objected, in fact, to any of his sayings and doings. What seemed also strange was that the waiter, whilst yet receiving and executing his orders, was evidently pretending to ignore his presence. But then, as I daresay you know as well as I do, French waiters are *such* actors!

'Well, to resume, there he was, this fourth man, seated at our table and feasting at our expense. And the pranks that he would play us—they were truly stupendous. He began his little game by ordering in half-a-dozen of champagne. And when the waiter seemed slightly doubtful and hesitating about executing the order, Topp, forsooth, must put in his oar, and indorse the command, actually pretending that *I*, who am now speaking to you, and who am the very last man in the world likely to dream of such a preposterous thing, had given the order, and that I was a jolly old brick, and the best of boon companions. Surprise at this barefaced assertion kept me mute, and so, of course, the champagne was brought in, and I thought the best thing to do under the circumstances was to have my share of it at least; and so I had—my fair share; but, bless you, it was nothing to what that fourth man drank of it. In fact, the amount of liquor *he* would swill on this and on the many subsequent occasions he intruded his presence upon us, was a caution.

'We paid our little bill without grumbling, though the presence of

the fourth man at our table had added rather heavily to the *addition*, as they call bills at French restaurants.

'We sallied forth into the street to get a whiff of fresh air. *He*, the demon, pertinaciously stuck to us; he familiarly linked his arm through mine, and, suggesting coffee as rather a good thing to take after dinner, took us over to the Café du Cardinal, where he, however, took none of the Arabian beverage himself (there being only three cups placed for us, as I distinctly saw), but drank an interminable succession of *chasse-café*, utterly regardless of the divisional lines on the cognac *carafon*. Part of these he would take neat, another portion he would burn over sugar, gloating glaringly over the bluish flame, while gleams of demoniac delight would flit across his ever-changing features. Jack Hobson and Topp, I am sorry to say, joined him with a will in this double-distilled debauch; and when I attempted to remonstrate with them, they brazenly asserted that *I*, who am now speaking to you, who have always, publicly and privately, declared brandy to be the worst of evil spirits, had taken more of it, to my own cheek, as they slangily expressed it, than the two of them together; and the waiter, who had evidently been bribed by them, boldly maintained that *le vieux monsieur*, as he had the impudence to call me, had swallowed *plus de trois carafons de fine*; whereupon the fourth man, stepping up to him, punched his head, which served him right. Now you will hardly believe me when I tell you that at that very instant Topp forced me back into my chair, whilst Jack Hobson pinioned my arms from behind, and the waiter had the unblushing effrontery to stamp and rave at me like a ma-

niac, demanding satisfaction or compensation at my hands for the unprovoked assault committed upon him by *me, coram populo!*—by *me*, who, I beg to assure you, am the most peaceable man living, and am actually famed for the mildness of my disposition and the sweetness and suavity of my temper. And, would you believe it? everybody present, waiters and guests, and my own two bosom-friends, joined in the conspiracy against me, and I actually had to give the wretch of a waiter ten francs as a plaster for his broken pate, and a salve for his wounded honour! Where was the real culprit all this time, you ask me—the fourth man? Why, he quietly stood by grinning, and they all and everyone of them pretended not to see him, though Topp and Jack Hobson next morning confessed to me that they certainly had an indistinct consciousness of the presence throughout of this miserable intruder.

'How we finished that night I remember not; nor could Jack Hobson or Emmanuel Topp. All we could conscientiously stand by, if we were questioned, is that we awoke next morning—the three of us—with some slight swimming in our heads, and a hazy recollection of a gorgeous dream of brilliant lights and sounds of music and revelry, and bright visions of groves and grottoes, and dancing houris (or hussies, as moral Jack Hobson calls the poor things), and a hot supper at a certain place in the Passage des Princes, of which I think the name is Peter's.

'I will not tire your courteous patience by a detailed narrative of our experiences day after day, during our fortnight's stay in Paris. Suffice it to tell you that from that time forward to yesterday, when we left, the *fourth man*, as we, by mutual consent, agreed to



call the phantom apparition, came in regularly to our dinner, with the dessert or a little after; that he would constantly suggest a fresh supply of Côte St. Jacques, Moulin-à-Vent, Beaune, Chambertin, Roderer Carte Blanche, and a variety of other, generally rather more than less expensive, wines—and that he somehow would manage to make us have them, too.

‘Then he would sally forth with us to the café, where he would indulge in irritating chaff of the waiters, and in slighting comments upon the great French nation in general, and the Parisians in particular, and upon their institutions and manners and customs.

‘He would insist upon singing the Marseillaise; he would speak disparagingly of the Emperor, whom he would irreverently call Lambert; he would pass cutting and unsavoury remarks upon the glorious system of the night-carts; he would call down the judgment of Heaven upon the devoted head of poor Mr. Haussmann; he would go up to some unhappy sergent-de-ville, who might, however unwittingly, excite his ire, and tell him a bit of his mind in English, with sarcastic allusions to his cocket-hat and his toasting-fork, and polite inquiries after the health of *ce cher* Monsieur Lambert, or the whereabouts of *cet excellent* Monsieur Godinot. The worst of the matter was that—I suppose for the reason that man is an imitative animal, a sort of *πίθηκος ὁμιῶν*, or Monbodidian monkey minus the tail—my two companions were, somehow, always sure to join the wretch in his evil behaviour, and to go on just as bad as he did. No wonder, then, that we got into no end of rows, and it is a marvel to me now, how ever we have managed to get off with a whole skin to our bodies.

‘He would insist upon taking us to Mabilly, the Closerie des Lilas, and the Châteaurouge, where he would indulge in the maddest pranks and antics, and somehow lead us to join in the wildest dances, and make us lift our legs as high as the highest lifter among the *habitués*, male or female.

‘One night, at about half-past two in the morning (*Hibernice*), he had the cool assurance to drag us along with him to the then closed entrance to the Passage des Princes, where he frantically shook the gate, and insisted to the frightened concierge, who came running up in his night-shirt, that Peter’s must and ought to be open still, as *we* had not had our supper yet; and Topp and Jack Hobson, forsooth, must join in the row. I have no distinct recollection of whether it was our phantom guest or either of my companions that madly strove to detain the hastily-retreating form of the concierge by a desperate clutch at the tail of his shirt; I only remember that the garment gave way in the struggle, and that the unhappy functionary was reduced nearly altogether to the primitive buff costume of the father of man in Paradise ere he had put his teeth into that unlucky apple of which the pips keep so inconveniently sticking in poor humanity’s gizzard to the present day. And what I remember also to my cost is, that the sergent-de-ville, whom the bereaved man’s shouts of distress brought to the scene, fastened upon *me*, the most inoffensive of mortals, for a compensation fine of twenty francs, as if *I* had been the culprit. And deuced glad we were, I assure you, to get off without more serious damage to our pocket and reputation than this, and a copious volley of *sacrés ivrognes Anglais*, fired at us by

the wretched concierge and his friend of the police, who, I am quite sure, went halves with him in the compensation. Ah! they are a lawless set, these French.

'On another occasion we three went to the Exhibition, where we visited one of our colonial departments, in company with several English friends, and some French gentlemen appointed on the wine jury. We went to taste a few samples of colonial wines. *He* was not with us *then*. Barely, however, had we uncorked a poor dozen bottles, which turned out rather good for colonial, though a little raw and slightly uneducated, when *who* should stalk in but our fourth man, as jaunty and unconcerned as ever. Well, *he* fell to tasting, and he soon grew eloquent in praise of the colonial juice, which he declared would, in another twenty years' time, be fit to compete successfully with the best French vintages. Of course, the French gentlemen with us could not stand *this*; they spoke slightly of the British colonial, and one of them even went so far as to call it rotgut. I cannot say whether it was the spirit of the uncompromising opinion thus pronounced, or the coarsely-indelicate way in which the judgment of our French friend was expressed, that riled our phantom guest—enough, it brought him down in full force upon the offender and his countrymen, with most fluent French vituperation and an unconscionable amount of bad jokes and worse puns, finishing up with a general address to them as members of the *disgusting* jury, instead of jury of *dégustation*. Now, this I should not have minded so much; for, I must confess, I felt rather nettled at the national conceit and prejudice of these French. But the wretch, in the impetuous utterance of his invective, must somehow—though I was not aware of it at

the time—have mimicked my gestures and imitated the very tones and accent of my voice so closely as to deceive even some of my English companions: or how else to account for the fact of their calling me a noisy brawler and a pestilent nuisance? *me*, the gentlest and mildest-spoken of mortals!

'Before our departure from London we had calculated our probable expenses on a most liberal scale, and we had made comfortable provision accordingly for a few weeks' stay in Paris. But with the additional heavy burden of the franking of so copious an imbibor as our fourth man thus unexpectedly thrown on our shoulders, it was no great wonder that we should find our resources go much faster than we had anticipated; so we had already been forcedly led to bethink ourselves of shortening our intended stay in the French capital, when a fresh exploit of the phantom fourth, climaxing all his past misdeeds, brought matters to a crisis.

'It was the day before yesterday, the 4th of September. We had been dining at Marigny, and dancing at Mabilie. Our eccentric guest had come in, as usual, with the champagne, and had of course, after dinner, taken us over to the enchanted gardens. We were all very jolly. *He* suggested supper at the Cascade, in the Bois de Boulogne. We chartered a *fiacre* to take us there and back. We supped rather copiously. *He* somehow made our coachman drunk, and took upon himself to drive us home. Need I tell you that he upset us in the Avenue de l'Impératrice, and that we had to walk it, and pretty fast too? It was a mercy there were no bones broken.

'Well, as we were walking along, just barely recovering from the shock of the accident, he suddenly took some new whim into his con-

founded noddle. Nothing would do for him but he must drag us along with him to the great entrance of the Elysée Napoléon (which *err* was, and maybe is soon likely to be once more, the Elysée Bourbon), where he had the brazen impudence to claim admittance, as the Emperor, he pretended, had been graciously pleased to offer us the splendid hospitality of that renowned mansion. What further happened here, neither I nor either of my friends can tell. Our recollections from this period till next morning are doubtful and indistinct. All we can state for certain is, that yesterday morning we awoke, the three of us, in a most wretched state, in a strange, nasty place. We learnt soon after from a gentleman in a cocked-hat, who came to visit us on business, that the imperial hospitality which we had claimed last night had indeed been extended to us—only in the *violon*, instead of the Elysée. Our phantom guest was gone: he would always somehow sneak away in the morning, when there was nothing left for him to drink—the guzzling villain!

‘The gentleman in the cocked-hat pressingly invited us to pay a visit to the Commissaire du Quartier. That formidable functionary received us with the customary French-polished veneer of urbanity which, as a rule, constitutes the *suaviter in modo* of the higher class of Gallic officials. He read us a severe lecture, however, upon the alleged impropriety of our conduct; and when I ventured to protest that it was not to us the blame ought to be imputed, but to the *quatrième*, he mistook my meaning, and, ere I could explain myself, he cut me short with a polite remark that the French used the cardinal instead of the ordinal numbers in stating the days of the month, with the exception of the first, and that he had had too much

trouble with our countrymen (he took us for Yankees!) on the 4th of July, to be disposed to look with an over-lenient eye upon the vagaries we had chosen to commit on the 4th of September, which he supposed was another great national day with us. He would, however, let us off this time with a simple reprimand, upon payment of one hundred francs, compensation for damage done to the coach—drunken cabby having turned up, of course, to testify against us. Well, we paid the money, and handed the worthy magistrate twenty francs besides, for the benefit of the poor, by way of acknowledgment for the imperial hospitality we had enjoyed. We were then allowed to depart in peace.

‘Now, you’ll hardly believe it, I daresay, but it is the truth notwithstanding, that we three, who have been fast friends for years, actually began to quarrel among ourselves now, mutually imputing to one another the blame of all our misadventures and misfortunes since our arrival in Paris, whilst yet we clearly knew and felt, each and every of us, that it was all the doings of that phantom fourth.

‘One thing, however, we all agreed to do—to leave Paris by the first train.

‘To fortify ourselves for the coming journey, we went to indulge in the luxury of a farewell breakfast at Désiré Beurain’s. Of course we emptied a few bottles to our reconciliation. I do not exactly remember how many, but this I *do* remember, that our irrepressible incubus walked in again, and took his place in the midst of us rather sooner even than he had been wont to do; and he never left us from that time to the moment of our landing at Dover harbour, when he took his, I hope and trust final, departure with a ghastly grin.

‘I daresay you must have thought

us a most noisy and obstreperous lot: well, with my hand on my heart, I can assure you, on my conscience, that a quieter and milder set of fellows than us three you are not likely to find on this or the other side the Channel. But for that mysterious phantom fourth—'

Here the whistle sounded, and the guard came up to us with a hurried, 'Now then, gents., take your seats, please; train is off in half a minnit!'

'What can have become of Topp and Jack Hobson?' muttered my new friend, looking around him with eager scrutiny. 'I should not wonder if they were still refreshing.' And he started off in the direction of the refreshment-room.

I took my seat. Immediately after the train whirled off. I cannot say whether the three were left behind; all I know is that I did not see them get out at London-bridge.

Remembering, however, that the appalling secret of the supernatural visitation which had thus harassed my three fellow-travellers had been confided to me under the impression that I might be likely to find a solution of the mystery, I

have ever since deeply pondered thereon.

Shallow thinkers, and sneerers uncharitably given, may, from a consideration of the times, places, and circumstances at and under which the abnormal phenomena here recited were stated to have been observed, be led to attribute them simply to the promptings and imaginings of brains overheated by excessive indulgence in spirituous liquors. But I, striving to be mindful always of the great scriptural injunction to judge not, lest we be judged, and opportunely remembering my friend O'Kweene's learned dissertation above alluded to, feel disposed to pronounce the apparition of the phantom of the fourth man, and all the sayings, doings, and demeanings of the same, to have been simply so many visible and palpable outward manifestations of the inner consciousness of the souls of the three, and more notably of that of the elderly senior of the party, in a succession of vino-alcoholic trances.

My friend O'Kweene is, of course, welcome to such credit as may attach to this attempted solution of mine.



## THE SPIRIT'S WHISPER.

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Yes, I have been haunted!—haunted so fearfully that for some little time I thought myself insane. I was no raving maniac; I mixed in society as heretofore, although perhaps a trifle more grave and taciturn than usual; I pursued my daily avocations; I employed myself even on literary work. To all appearance I was one of the sanest of the sane; and yet all the while I considered myself the victim of such strange delusions that, in my own mind, I fancied my senses—and one sense in particular—so far erratic and beyond my own control that I was, in real truth, a madman. How far I was then insane it must be for others, who hear my story, to decide. My hallucinations have long since left me, and, at all events, I am now as sane as I suppose most men are.

My first attack came on one afternoon when, being in a listless and an idle mood, I had risen from my work and was amusing myself with speculating at my window on the different personages who were passing before me. At that time I occupied apartments in the Brompton-road. Perhaps, there is no thoroughfare in London where the ordinary passengers are of so varied a description, or high life and low life mingle in so perpetual a medley. South-Kensington carriages there jostle costermongers' carts; the clerk in the public office, returning to his suburban dwelling, brushes the labourer coming from his work on the never-ending modern constructions in the new district; and the ladies of some of the surround-

ing squares flaunt the most gigantic of *chignons*, and the most exuberant of motley dresses, before the envying eyes of the ragged girls with their vegetable-baskets.

There was, as usual, plenty of material for observation and conjecture in the passengers, and their characters or destinations, from my window on that day. Yet I was not in the right cue for the thorough enjoyment of my favourite amusement. I was in a rather melancholy mood. Somehow or other, I don't know why, my memory had reverted to a pretty woman whom I had not seen for many years. She had been my first love, and I had loved her with a boyish passion as genuine as it was intense. I thought my heart would have broken, and I certainly talked seriously of dying, when she formed an attachment to an ill-conditioned, handsome young adventurer, and, on her family objecting to such an alliance, eloped with him. I had never seen the fellow, against whom, however, I cherished a hatred almost as intense as my passion for the infatuated girl who had flown from her home for his sake. We had heard of her being on the Continent with her husband, and learned that the man's shifty life had eventually taken him to the East. For some years nothing more had been heard of the poor girl. It was a melancholy history, and its memory ill-disposed me for amusement.

A sigh was probably just escaping my lips with the half-articu-

lated words, 'Poor Julia!' when my eyes fell on a man passing before my window. There was nothing particularly striking about him. He was tall, with fine features, and a long, fair beard, contrasting somewhat with his bronzed complexion. I had seen many of our officers on their return from the Crimea look much the same. Still, the man's aspect gave me a shuddering feeling, I didn't know why. At the same moment, a whispering, low voice uttered aloud in my ear the words, 'It is he!' I turned, startled; there was no one near me, no one in the room. There was no fancy in the sound; I had heard the words with painful distinctness. I ran to the door, opened it—not a sound on the staircase, not a sound in the whole house—nothing but the hum from the street. I came back and sat down. It was no use reasoning with myself; I had the ineffaceable conviction that I had heard the voice. Then first the idea crossed my mind that I might be the victim of hallucinations. Yes, it must have been so, for now I recalled to mind that the voice had been that of my poor lost Julia; and at the moment I heard it I had been dreaming of her. I questioned my own state of health. I was well; at least I had been so, I felt fully assured, up to that moment. Now a feeling of chilliness and numbness and faintness had crept over me, a cold sweat was on my forehead. I tried to shake off this feeling by bringing back my thoughts to some other subject. But, involuntarily as it were, I again uttered the words, 'Poor Julia!' aloud. At the same time a deep and heavy sigh, almost a groan, was distinctly audible close by me. I sprang up; I was alone—quite alone. It was, once more, an hallucination.

By degrees the first painful im-

pression wore away. Some days had passed, and I had begun to forget my singular delusion. When my thoughts did revert to it, the recollection was dismissed as that of a ridiculous fancy. One afternoon I was in the Strand, coming from Charing-cross, when I was once more overcome by that peculiar feeling of cold and numbness which I had before experienced. The day was warm and bright and genial, and yet I positively shivered. I had scarce time to interrogate my own strange sensations when a man went by me rapidly. How was it that I recognised him at once as the individual who had only passed my window so casually on that morning of the hallucination? I don't know, and yet I was aware that this man was the tall fair passer-by of the Brompton-road. At the same moment the voice I had previously heard whispered distinctly in my ear the words, 'Follow him!' I stood stupefied. The usual throngs of indifferent persons were hurrying past me in that crowded thoroughfare, but I felt convinced that not one of these had spoken to me. I remained transfixed for a moment. I was bent on a matter of business in the contrary direction to the individual I had remarked, and so, although with unsteady step, I endeavoured to proceed on my way. Again that voice said, still more emphatically, in my ear, 'Follow him!' I stopped involuntarily. And a third time, 'Follow him!' I told myself that the sound was a delusion, a cheat of my senses, and yet I could not resist the spell. I turned to follow. Quickening my pace, I soon came up with the tall fair man, and, unremarked by him, I followed him. Whither was this foolish pursuit to lead me? It was useless to ask myself the question—I was impelled to follow.

I was not destined to go very far, however. Before long the object of my absurd chase entered a well-known insurance-office. I stopped at the door of the establishment. I had no business within, why should I continue to follow? Had I not already been making a sad fool of myself by my ridiculous conduct? These were my thoughts as I stood heated by my quick walk. Yes, heated; and yet, once more, came the sudden chill. Once more that same low but now awful voice spoke in my ear: 'Go in!' it said. I endeavoured to resist the spell, and yet I felt that resistance was in vain. Fortunately, as it seemed to me, the thought crossed my mind that an old acquaintance was a clerk in that same insurance-office. I had not seen the fellow for a great length of time, and I never had been very intimate with him. But here was a pretext; and so I went in and inquired for Clement Stanley. My acquaintance came forward. He was very busy, he said. I invented, on the spur of the moment, some excuse of the most frivolous and absurd nature, as far as I can recollect, for my intrusion.

'By the way,' I said, as I turned to take my leave, although my question was 'by the way' of nothing at all, 'who was that tall fair man who just now entered the office?'

'O, that fellow?' was the indifferent reply; 'a Captain Campbell, or Canton, or some such name; I forget what. He is gone in before the board—insured his wife's life—and she is dead; comes for a settlement, I suppose.'

There was nothing more to be gained, and so I left the office. As soon as I came without into the scorching sunlight, again the same feeling of cold, again the same voice—'Wait!' Was I going mad? More and more the conviction

forced itself upon me that I was decidedly a monomaniac already. I felt my pulse. It was agitated and yet not feverish. I was determined not to give way to this absurd hallucination; and yet, so far was I out of my senses, that my will was no longer my own. Resolved as I was to go, I listened to the dictates of that voice and waited. What was it to me that this Campbell or Canton had insured his wife's life, that she was dead, and that he wanted a settlement of his claim? Obviously nothing; and I yet waited.

So strong was the spell on me that I had no longer any count of time. I had no consciousness whether the period was long or short that I stood there near the door, heedless of all the throng that passed, gazing on vacancy. The fiercest of policemen might have told me to 'move on,' and I should not have stirred, spite of all the terrors of the 'station.' The individual came forth. He paid no heed to me. Why should he? What was I to him? This time I needed no warning voice to bid me follow. I was a madman, and I could not resist the impulses of my madness. It was thus, at least, I reasoned with myself. I followed into Regent-street. The object of my insensate observation lingered, and looked around as if in expectation. Presently a fine-looking woman, somewhat extravagantly dressed, and obviously not a lady, advanced towards him on the pavement. At the sight of her he quickened his step, and joined her rapidly. I shuddered again, but this time a sort of dread was mingled with that strange shivering. I knew what was coming, and it came. Again that voice in my ear. 'Look and remember!' it said. I passed the man and woman as they stopped at their first meeting.

'Is all right, George?' said the female.

'All right, my girl,' was the reply.

I looked. An evil smile, as if of wicked triumph, was on the man's face I thought. And on the woman's? I looked at her, and I remembered. I could not be mistaken. Spite of her change in manner, dress, and appearance, it was Mary Simms. This woman some years before, when she was still very young, had been a sort of humble companion to my mother. A simple-minded, honest girl, we thought her. Sometimes I had fancied that she had paid me, in a sly way, a marked attention. I had been foolish enough to be flattered by her stealthy glances and her sighs. But I had treated these little demonstrations of partiality as due only to a silly girlish fancy. Mary Simms, however, had come to grief in our household. She had been detected in the abstraction of sundry jewels and petty ornaments. The morning after the discovery she had left the house, and we had heard of her no more. As these recollections passed rapidly through my mind I looked behind me. The couple had turned back. I turned to follow again; and spite of carriages and cabs, and shouts and oaths of drivers, I took the middle of the street in order to pass the man and woman at a little distance unobserved. No; I was not mistaken. The woman was Mary Simms, though without any trace of all her former simple-minded airs; Mary Simms, no longer in her humble attire, but flaunting in all the finery of overdone fashion. She wore an air of reckless joyousness in her face; and yet, spite of that, I pitied her. It was clear she had fallen on the evil ways of bettered fortune—bettered, alas! for the worse.

I had an excuse now, in my own

mind, for my continued pursuit, without deeming myself an utter madman—the excuse of curiosity to know the destiny of one with whom I had been formerly familiar, and in whom I had taken an interest. Presently the game I was hunting down stopped at the door of the Grand Café. After a little discussion they entered. It was a public place of entertainment; there was no reason why I should not enter also. I found my way to the first floor. They were already seated at a table, Mary holding the *carte* in her hand. They were about to dine. Why should not I dine there too? There was but one little objection,—I had an engagement to dinner. But the strange impulse which overpowered me, and seemed leading me on step by step, spite of myself, quickly overruled all the dictates of propriety towards my intended hosts. Could I not send a prettily-devised apology? I glided past the couple, with my head averted, seeking a table, and I was unobserved by my old acquaintance. I was too agitated to eat, but I made a semblance, and little heeded the air of surprise and almost disgust on the bewildered face of the waiter as he bore away the barely-touched dishes. I was in a very fever of impatience and doubt what next to do. They still sat on, in evident enjoyment of their meal and their constant draughts of sparkling wine. My impatience was becoming almost unbearable when the man at last rose. The woman seemed to have uttered some expostulation, for he turned at the door and said somewhat harshly aloud, 'Nonsense; only one game and I shall be back. The waiter will give you a paper—a magazine—something to while away the time.' And he left the room for the billiard-table, as I surmised.

Now was my opportunity. After



a little hesitation, I rose, and planted myself abruptly on the vacant seat before the woman.

'Mary,' I said.

She started, with a little exclamation of alarm, and dropped the paper she had held. She knew me at once.

'Master John?' she exclaimed, using the familiar term still given me when I was long past boyhood; and then, after a lengthened gaze, she turned away her head. I was embarrassed at first how to address her.

'Mary,' I said at last, 'I am grieved to see you thus.'

'Why should you be grieved for me?' she retorted, looking at me sharply, and speaking in a tone of impatient anger. 'I am happy as I am.'

'I don't believe you,' I replied.

She again turned away her head.

'Mary,' I pursued, 'can you doubt that, spite of all, I have still a strong interest in the companion of my youth?'

She looked at me almost mournfully, but did not speak. At that moment I probably grew pale; for suddenly that chilly fit seized me again, and my forehead became clammy. That voice sounded again in my ear: 'Speak of him!' were the words it uttered. Mary gazed on me with surprise, and yet I was assured that *she* had not heard that voice, so plain to me. She evidently mistook the nature of my visible emotion.

'O Master John!' she stammered, with tears gathering in her eyes, reverting again to that name of bygone times, 'if you had loved me then—if you had consoled my true affection with one word of hope, one look of loving-kindness—if you had not spurned and crushed me, I should not have been what I am now.'

I was about to make some answer to this burst of unforgotten

passion, when the voice came again: 'Speak of him!'

'You have loved others since,' I remarked, with a coldness which seemed cruel to myself. 'You love *him* now.' And I nodded my head towards the door by which the man had disappeared.

'Do I?' she said, with a bitter smile. 'Perhaps; who knows?'

'And yet no good can come to you from a connection with that man,' I pursued.

'Why not? He adores me, and he is free,' was her answer, given with a little triumphant air.

'Yes,' I said, 'I know he is free: he has lately lost his wife. He has made good his claim to the sum for which he insured her life.'

Mary grew deadly pale. 'How did you learn this? what do you know of him?' she stammered.

I had no reply to give. She scanned my face anxiously for some time; then in a low voice she added, 'What do you suspect?'

I was still silent, and only looked at her fixedly.

'You do not speak,' she pursued nervously. 'Why do you not speak? Ah, you know more than you would say! Master John, Master John, you might set my tortured mind at rest, and clear or confirm those doubts which *will* come into my poor head, spite of myself. Speak out—O, do speak out!'

'Not here; it is impossible,' I replied, looking around. The room, as the hour advanced, was becoming more thronged with guests, and the full tables gave a pretext for my reticence, when in truth I had nothing to say.

'Will you come and see me—will you?' she asked with earnest entreaty.

I nodded my head.

'Have you a pocket-book? I will write you my address; and

you will come—yes, I am sure you will come!’ she said in an agitated way.

I handed her my pocket-book and pencil; she wrote rapidly.

‘Between the hours of three and five,’ she whispered, looking uneasily at the door; ‘*he* is sure not to be at home.’

I rose; Mary held out her hand to me, then withdrew it hastily with an air of shame, and the tears sprang into her eyes again. I left the room hurriedly, and met her companion on the stairs.

That same evening, in the solitude of my own room, I pondered over the little event of the day. I had calmed down from my state of excitement. The living apparition of Mary Simms occupied my mind almost to the exclusion of the terrors of the ghostly voice which had haunted me, and my own fears of coming insanity. In truth, what was that man to me? Nothing. What did his doings matter to such a perfect stranger as myself? Nothing. His connection with Mary Simms was our only link; and in what should that affect me? Nothing again. I debated with myself whether it were not foolish of me to comply with my youthful companion’s request to visit her; whether it were not imprudent in me to take any farther interest in the lost woman; whether there were not even danger in seeking to penetrate mysteries which were no concern of mine. The resolution to which I came pleased me, and I said aloud, ‘No, I will not go!’

At the same moment came again the voice, like an awful echo to my words—‘Go!’ It came so suddenly and so imperatively, almost without any previous warning of the usual shudder, that the shock was more than I could bear. I believe I fainted; I know I found myself, when I came to consciousness, in my arm-chair, cold and

numb, and my candles had almost burned down into their sockets.

The next morning I was really ill. A sort of low fever seemed to have prostrated me, and I would have willingly seized so valid a reason for disobeying, at least for that day—for some days, perhaps—the injunction of that ghostly voice. But all that morning it never left me. My fearful chilly fit was of constant recurrence, and the words ‘Go! go! go!’ were murmured so perpetually in my ears—the sound was one of such urgent entreaty—that all force of will gave way completely. Had I remained in that lone room, I should have gone wholly mad. As yet, to my own feelings, I was but partially out of my senses.

I dressed hastily; and, I scarce know how—by no effort of my own will, it seemed to me—I was in the open air. The address of Mary Simms was in a street not far from my own suburb. Without any power of reasoning, I found myself before the door of the house. I knocked, and asked a slipshod girl who opened the door to me for ‘Miss Simms.’ She knew no such person, held a brief shrill colloquy with some female in the back-parlour, and, on coming back, was about to shut the door in my face, when a voice from above—the voice of her I sought—called down the stairs, ‘Let the gentleman come up!’

I was allowed to pass. In the front drawing-room I found Mary Simms.

‘They do not know me under that name,’ she said with a mournful smile, and again extended, then withdrew, her hand.

‘Sit down,’ she went on to say, after a nervous pause. ‘I am alone now; and I adjure you, if you have still one latent feeling of old kindness for me, explain your words of yesterday to me.’

I muttered something to the effect that I had no explanation to give. No words could be truer; I had not the slightest conception what to say.

'Yes, I am sure you have; you must, you will,' pursued Mary excitedly; 'you have some knowledge of that matter.'

'What matter?' I asked.

'Why, the insurance,' she replied impatiently. 'You know well what I mean. My mind has been distracted about it. Spite of myself, terrible suspicions have forced themselves on me. No; I don't mean that,' she cried, suddenly checking herself and changing her tone; 'don't heed what I said; it was madness in me to say what I did. But do, do, do tell me all you know.'

The request was a difficult one to comply with, for I knew nothing. It is impossible to say what might have been the end of this strange interview, in which I began to feel myself an unwilling impostor; but suddenly Mary started.

'The noise of the latchkey in the lock!' she cried, alarmed; 'he has returned; he must not see you; you must come another time. Here, here, be quick! I'll manage him.'

And before I could utter another word she had pushed me into the back drawing-room and closed the door. A man's step on the stairs; then voices. The man was begging Mary to come out with him, as the day was so fine. She excused herself; he would hear no refusal. At last she appeared to consent, on condition that the man would assist at her toilet. There was a little laughter, almost hysterical on the part of Mary, whose voice evidently quivered with trepidation.

• Presently both mounted the upper stairs. Then the thought

struck me that I had left my hat in the front room—a sufficient cause for the woman's alarm. I opened the door cautiously, seized my hat, and was about to steal down the stairs, when I was again spell-bound by that numb cold.

'Stay!' said the voice. I staggered back to the other room with my hat, and closed the door.

Presently the couple came down. Mary was probably relieved by discovering that my hat was no longer there, and surmised that I had departed; for I heard her laughing as they went down the lower flight. Then I heard them leave the house.

I was alone in that back drawing-room. Why? what did I want there? I was soon to learn. I felt the chill invisible presence near me; and the voice said, 'Search!'

The room belonged to the common representative class of back drawing-rooms in 'apartments' of the better kind. The only one unfamiliar piece of furniture was an old Indian cabinet; and my eye naturally fell on that. As I stood and looked at it with a strange unaccountable feeling of fascination, again came the voice—'Search!'

I shuddered and obeyed. The cabinet was firmly locked; there was no power of opening it except by burglarious infraction; but still the voice said, 'Search!'

A thought suddenly struck me, and I turned the cabinet from its position against the wall. Behind, the woodwork had rotted, and in many portions fallen away, so that the inner drawers were visible. What could my ghostly monitor mean—that I should open those drawers? I would not do such a deed of petty treachery. I turned defiantly, and addressing myself to the invisible, as if it were a living creature by my side, I cried, 'I

must not, will not, do such an act of baseness.'

The voice replied, 'Search!'

I might have known that, in my state of what I deemed insanity, resistance was in vain. I grasped the most accessible drawer from behind, and pulled it towards me. Uppermost within it lay letters: they were addressed to 'Captain Cameron,'—'Captain George Cameron.' That name!—the name of Julia's husband, the man with whom she had eloped; for it was he who was the object of my pursuit.

My shuddering fit became so strong that I could scarce hold the papers; and 'Search!' was repeated in my ear.

Below the letters lay a small book in a limp black cover. I opened this book with trembling hand; it was filled with manuscript—Julia's well-known handwriting.

'Read!' muttered the voice. I read. There were long entries by poor Julia of her daily life; complaints of her husband's unkindness, neglect, then cruelty. I turned to the last pages: her hand had grown very feeble now, and she was very ill. 'George seems kinder now,' she wrote; 'he brings me all my medicines with his own hand.' Later on: 'I am dying; I know I am dying: he has poisoned me. I saw him last night through the curtains pour something in my cup; I saw it in his evil eye. I would not drink; I will drink no more; but I feel that I must die.'

These were the last words. Below were written, in a man's bold hand, the words 'Poor fool!'

This sudden revelation of poor Julia's death and dying thoughts unnerved me quite. I grew colder in my whole frame than ever.

'Take it!' said her voice. I took the book, pushed back the cabinet

into its place against the wall, and, leaving that fearful room, stole down the stairs with trembling limbs, and left the house with all the feelings of a guilty thief.

For some days I perused my poor lost Julia's diary again and again. The whole revelation of her sad life and sudden death led but to one conclusion,—she had died of poison by the hands of her unworthy husband. He had insured her life, and then—

It seemed evident to me that Mary Simms had vaguely shared suspicions of the same foul deed. On my own mind came conviction. But what could I do next? how bring this evil man to justice? what proof would be deemed to exist in those writings? I was bewildered, weak, irresolute. Like Hamlet, I shrank back and temporised. But I was not feigning madness; my madness seemed but all too real for me. During all this period the wailing of that wretched voice in my ear was almost incessant. O, I must have been mad!

I wandered about restlessly, like the haunted thing I had become. One day I had come unconsciously and without purpose into Oxford-street. My troubled thoughts were suddenly broken in upon by the solicitations of a beggar. With a heart hardened against begging impostors, and under the influence of the shock rudely given to my absorbing dreams, I answered more hardly than was my wont. The man heaved a heavy sigh, and sobbed forth, 'Then Heaven help me!' I caught sight of him before he turned away. He was a ghastly object, with fever in his hollow eyes and sunken cheeks, and fever on his dry, chapped lips. But I knew, or fancied I knew, the tricks of the trade, and I was obdurate. Why, I asked myself, should the

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cold shudder come over me at such a moment? But it was so strong on me as to make me shake all over. It came—that maddening voice. ‘Succour!’ it said now. I had become so accustomed already to address the ghostly voice that I cried aloud, ‘Why, Julia, why?’ I saw people laughing in my face at this strange cry, and I turned in the direction in which the beggar had gone. I just caught sight of him as he was tottering down a street towards Soho. I determined to have pity for this once, and followed the poor man. He led me on through I know not what streets. His step was hurried now. In one street I lost sight of him; but I felt convinced he must have turned into a dingy court. I made inquiries, but for a time received only rude jeering answers from the rough men and women whom I questioned. At last a little girl informed me that I must mean the strange man who lodged in the garret of a house she pointed out to me. It was an old dilapidated building, and I had much repugnance on entering it. But again I was no master of my will. I mounted some creaking stairs to the top of the house, until I could go no farther. A shattered door was open; I entered a wretched garret; the object of my search lay now on a bundle of rags on the bare floor. He opened his wild eyes as I approached.

‘I have come to succour,’ I said, using unconsciously the word of the voice; ‘what ails you?’

‘Ails me?’ gasped the man; ‘hunger, starvation, fever.’

I was horrified. Hurrying to the top of the stairs, I shouted till I had roused the attention of an old woman. I gave her money to bring me food and brandy, promising her a recompense for her trouble.

‘Have you no friends?’ I ask-

ed the wretched man as I returned.

‘None,’ he said feebly. Then as the fever rose in his eyes and even flushed his pallid face, he said excitedly, ‘I had a master once—one I perilled my soul for. He knows I am dying; but, spite of all my letters, he will not come. He wants me dead, he wants me dead—and his wish is coming to pass now.’

‘Cannot I find him—bring him here?’ I asked.

The man stared at me, shook his head, and at last, as if collecting his faculties with much exertion, muttered, ‘Yes; it is a last hope; perhaps you may, and I can be revenged on him at least. Yes, revenged. I have threatened him already.’ And the fellow laughed a wild laugh.

‘Control yourself,’ I urged, kneeling by his side; ‘give me his name—his address.’

‘Captain George Cameron,’ he gasped, and then fell back.

‘Captain George Cameron!’ I cried. ‘Speak! what of him?’

But the man’s senses seemed gone; he only muttered incoherently. The old woman returned with the food and spirits. I had found one honest creature in that foul region. I gave her money—promised her more if she would bring a doctor. She departed on her new errand. I raised the man’s head, moistened his lips with the brandy, and then poured some of the spirit down his throat. He gulped at it eagerly, and opened his eyes; but he still raved incoherently, ‘I did not do it, it was he. He made me buy the poison; he dared not risk the danger himself, the coward! I knew what he meant to do with it, and yet I did not speak; I was her murderer too. Poor Mrs. Cameron! poor Mrs. Cameron! do you forgive?—can you forgive?’ And the man

screamed aloud and stretched out his arms as if to fright away a phantom.

I had drunk-in every word, and knew the meaning of those broken accents well. Could I have found at last the means of bringing justice on the murderer's head? But the man was raving in a delirium, and I was obliged to hold him with all my strength. A step on the stairs: Could it be the medical man I had sent for? That would be indeed a blessing. A man entered—it was Cameron!

He came in jantily, with the words, 'How now, Saunders, you rascal! What more do you want to get out of me?'

He started at the sight of a stranger.

I rose from my kneeling posture like an accusing spirit. I struggled for calm; but passion beyond my control mastered me, and was I not a madman? I seized him by the throat, with the words, 'Murderer! poisoner! where is Julia?' He shook me off violently.

'And who the devil are you, sir?' he cried.

'That murdered woman's cousin?' I rushed at him again.

'Lying hound!' he shouted, and grappled me. His strength was far beyond mine. He had his hand on my throat; a crimson darkness was in my eyes; I could not see, I could not hear; there was a torrent of sound pouring in my ears. Suddenly his grasp relaxed. When I recovered my sight, I saw the murderer struggling with the fever-stricken man, who had risen from the floor, and seized him from behind. This unexpected diversion saved my life;

but the ex-groom was soon thrown back on the ground.

'Captain George Cameron,' I cried, 'kill me; but you will only heap another murder on your head!'

He advanced on me with something glittering in his hand. Without a word he made a stab at me; but at the same moment I darted at him a heavy blow. What followed was too confused for clear remembrance. I saw—no, I will say I fancied that I saw—the dim form of Julia Staunton standing between me and her vile husband. Did he see the vision too? I cannot say. He reeled back, and fell heavily to the floor. Maybe it was only my blow that felled him. Then came confusion—a dream of a crowd of people—policemen—muttered accusations. I had fainted from the wound in my arm.

Captain George Cameron was arrested. Saunders recovered, and lived long enough to be the principal witness on his trial. The murderer was found guilty. Poor Julia's diary, too, which I had abstracted, told fearfully against him. But he contrived to escape the gallows; he had managed to conceal poison on his person, and he was found dead in his cell. Mary Simms I never saw again. I once received a little scrawl, 'I am at peace now, Master John. God bless you!'

I have had no more hallucinations since that time; the voice has never come again. I found out poor Julia's grave, and, as I stood and wept by its side, the cold shudder came over me for the last time. Who shall tell me whether I was once really mad, or whether I was not?

## THE OLD GENTLEMAN'S STORY.

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I do not know that I have anything I care to tell, which you would think worth your hearing. There are few lives in which there has not been some incident which, if candidly told, would not possess the power to stir another human heart, raise one throb of sympathetic emotion, or, perhaps, draw a sudden break of tears from eyes which have long been dry to their own sorrows. But *who* possesses such candour, living, to tell the *true* story of his life? dying, to lay bare the secrets which, when he is gone, might leave him a less solid reputation than human vanity would, even at its last gasp, cling to? If anybody possesses such courage or such candour, certainly I do not, although I have often thought that no sensational romance would be more thrilling, no psychological inquiry more deeply curious, than the candid record of *one* single human life; adding to no praiseworthy action, extenuating from no unworthy impulse, but simply giving the history of the evil and the good, the reality and romance, in one actual existence, with the train of thought, the force of imagination, exposed as clearly before the world as the actions which had been governed or altered by their influence.

But a casual observation made by someone in our company to-day has sent my mind wandering back into the Past—long forgotten, or long disused, it comes to the same at last—back I fled to the bygone times; and the forgotten story, so vivid long ago, so faint in its hues to-day, has started into

unsuspected life again. It was only this afternoon that some one of our party spoke of the gray old gables and dark fir-woods of Vere Park, lamenting that their present possessors left them to decay, and that to the present Lord Vere his ancient woods had no value but such as they brought when felled, and the long sloping hills of purple heather no beauty compared with the heath of Newmarket. 'Truly,' said that same one, 'it is a grief to see a fine old place abandoned to the owls for the love of gambling, or the feverish excitement of a race.' Such, I grieve to say, has actually been the story of many an English park, such tastes have proved the downfall of many an old manorial hall; but such has *not* been the story of Vere Park. Would you like to know its history? There are few living now who know, none that the truth can any longer hurt; but those gray walls have not been left silent and deserted without a cause.

Fifty years ago the county of Surrey wondered with a yearly-increasing surprise why Lady Margaret Vere remained unmarried. She was—as all of you who have properly studied their collateral branches in the British Bible ought to know—eldest of the three daughters and coheirs of the thirteenth Earl Vere, by the second daughter of the fourth Marquis of Towcester. Her father's death, without male issue, left the title and entailed estates to her cousin, the fourteenth Earl (father to the Lord Vere of turf notoriety); but the use of Vere Park was bequeathed to Lady Mar-



THE OLD GENTLEMAN'S STORY.





garet for her life, to revert after her death, whether she died married or single, to her cousin, the fourteenth Earl, who was already in possession of the greater family place at Kirby Mortimer, the estates of Chalkum-Chalvey, and of Claypole in the hundred of Hoo. The will was a just one; for at her father's death Lady Margaret, at thirty-four, was as helpless a creature to be left alone, and as unfit to seek a home for herself, as can well be imagined. But Lady Margaret was rich besides, in gold and silver, and embroidered vests; and without her life-interest in Vere Park, its rich pastures, its spreading timber, so thick as actually to invite the axe, she could take rank as a considerable heiress, and afford a rich prize, much to be sought after, to the younger sons of her day. Nor was she without pretensions to beauty and accomplishments also. She had been what is called 'sweetly pretty,' in the blue-eyed and golden-haired style; but she faded early; and she sang, without much strength of voice or any ear whatever, but full of confidence in her powers, most sweetly, most untruly, till you almost forgot the audacious false-ness of her notes in their surprising clearness. Also she touched the harp with grace, if not with accuracy; and she was an adept at a fearful art of torturing flowers which has happily survived in our days only as a name, as a mystery, still darkly whispered of as 'poonah-painting.'

Do not think that Lady Margaret Vere had been without her lovers; many had sighed at that shrine; her foolish prettiness had gained much boyish admiration, her gilded charms more serious tributes from maturer years. But, to her misfortune, Lady Margaret Vere was not altogether a fool—worse, *far* worse than that—she was a fool who conceived she had

a mission. This mission was to marry her cousin, the future Earl Vere; nor did she consider such marriage as a tribute of spontaneous affection on his part, but simply as a necessary civility to be offered by a gentleman in *his* position to a lady in *hers*. He *must* feel, she imagined, that if she was not a boy, she was not to blame for it; for had the option been offered her, she would gladly have been one; but as things had been managed for her by Providence with so little tact, Lord Vere ought, she felt assured, to make all the amends in his power by marrying her when he came of age. He was not indeed a person to inspire or to feel affection; he was short, marked with the small-pox, and married a Miss Pringle at about the time when Lady Margaret expected him to marry *her*. This insult she never forgave, this neglect of a self-evident duty she never forgot; and it influenced all her future life, although she was magnanimous enough to wear black ribbons for Miss Pringle when she died after nine wretched years of an ill-assorted marriage. Nor had Lady Margaret, during these nine years, been without her own trials; her sisters, Anne and Araminta, whom she did not consider so good-looking as herself, had married prosperously, whilst she, the eldest, was single still; and her father had been so ill-advised as to have a lingering illness, which had bored her very much.

When that illness ended in his death, she was still only thirty-four; but she presented to the outside world very much the aspect of a pink-and-white muslin gown—not, alas, printed in fast colours—which had been washed, and then hung up, all limp and out of form, to dry. Two years had passed since then, and Lady Margaret still bewailed her virginity among the Surrey hills.

She had quarrelled quite comfortably—without acrimony, but without much prospect of reconciliation—with both her sisters; and she now sat down in the old house at Vere Park, too indolent to bestir herself, even for her pleasure's sake, content to wait for whatever Fate might think it well-bred to offer to an earl's daughter. She still played her harp, and distorted her poor, unoffending flowers; she saw little or no society of her own class, but to the poor was no illiberal friend; nor, so far as her small lights went, negligent of her duties. Among these duties she numbered the protection of a certain Rosamond Price, the penniless granddaughter of a Vere who had advised herself to marry the clergyman of the parish, and had been snubbed by her relations as the offence deserved. But Lady Margaret considered that as the offender had long been dead, there was no necessity for vicarious punishment; and that to leave Rosamond Price to starve, whilst a drop of their blood mixed with the plebeian fluid in her veins, was unworthy of the house of Vere. So she took Rosamond to live with her; and when she had done this, had given her some gowns, and failed to instruct her in the mysteries of poonah-painting, she thought she had done her duty handsomely by the girl. Any further education she deemed unbecoming in Rosamond Price's condition in life; any display of affection on her part unnecessary; indeed, such torpid affections as she had to bestow she could not give to this girl, who was thoroughly uncongenial to her, and whose robust gipsy beauty quite annoyed her by its perfection and its vulgarity. What business had a young person in her situation with such very red lips, such offensively black eyes, and above all, with a figure whose proportions were

so very unnecessarily developed? So Rosamond Price grew up to womanhood untaught, uncared for, unprincipled, with a fierce desire in her mind for every forbidden pleasure, with a roving disposition which longed to burst those restraints which bound her so irksomely to her protectress, to whom she felt but little gratitude, and for whom she had no love.

It chanced that one brilliant morning in the very early autumn, Lady Margaret, having finished her breakfast, bethought herself of a poor dependent who might not have breakfasted equally well. Always kindly disposed towards her poorer neighbours—for was it not the duty of the Veres to protect their vassals?—she filled her village basket with a good supply of bread and meat, and set out through the quiet lanes on her solitary walk to Mary Matcham's cottage. That was the season when the dying summer, proud even in death of her beauty, puts on her most sumptuous robe of gold and crimson to look her last upon the familiar woods; wherever she dropped her fingers, fresh loveliness, tints more gorgeous, bloomed for a brief season from the hedges. How monotonous their old unvarying green seemed beside the new splendour of their attire! Some she touched with gold, some she hung with coral chaplets; even the common spider's web she sprinkled with diamond stars. Between such hedges paced Lady Margaret Vere, not insensible to the beauty of the scene, graciously disposed towards the golden beeches, the blue skies, even to the pleasant rustling of the leaves beneath her feet; to *her* the falling leaf brought no message with it, for what could decay presume to have in common with an heiress of the house of Vere?

She was accompanied by her

Pomeranian dog, Loup-loup, and if there was a thing on earth she really *loved*, it was Loup-loup; the dog, on its part, though of truculent manner towards strangers, and strongly disposed to be uncivil to its own kind, fully returned her affection, and taking a lively interest in the rabbit species, enjoyed its walk probably more than she did. But when they reached Mary Matcham's cottage, Lady Margaret found the door locked and the house empty; the Goody, unsuspecting of the fine supply of cold meats awaiting her, had gone out, gleaning, perhaps, or hop-picking, what know I? At any rate, Goody Matcham had gone out for the day, and after knocking vainly at the closed door, there was nothing for it but for Lady Margaret to take up her basket and go home again. It was all very tiresome, and very ill-bred, she thought; but there was nothing else to do.

At this season of the year cub-hunting had already begun, and the hounds which hunted that side of the Surrey country were, at that time, a very peculiar pack indeed. It was a saying in the county that Squire Bigg's hounds killed *no* foxes, but ate *all* cats. Nowadays, I have no doubt, things are very differently managed; even then, the accusation was, I hope, incorrect; still, it is certain that Squire Bigg spent as little, or less than he possibly could upon the nourishment of his pack, which were notorious chiefly for a total inaptitude to kill a fox, and for an impartial voracity, which induced them to linger in a cover to discuss the casual rabbit, as well as to pause in any village they happened to pass through, in search of the domestic cat—the meal they were accused of loving best; in *this* they may have been belied, but they were, in truth, the terror

of all cat-loving crones. They had an evil reputation as regarded their powers of digesting the village cur, and being also a tall, lean, raw-boned pack, they had a habit, when descending the village street, of opening wide their huge lantern-jaws, which rendered them a caution to all small children who might happen to cross their path. Such, and with so evil a celebrity, was the pack which, on its return from an unsuccessful cub-hunt, chanced to turn the corner by Mary Matcham's cottage, just as Lady Margaret was abandoning the door. Whether it was the beautiful brush of the Pomeranian, or the inviting smell of the cold meat, which attracted them, who can tell? At any rate, they made straight, with an ill-omened howl, at Lady Margaret Vere; she, not unreasonably terrified, more for Loup-loup than for herself, rushed back up the garden-path, and pushed frantically at the cottage-door. It neither gave way to her efforts, nor, as before, was any answer returned from within. What *should* she do? The hounds were even now bay-ing at the garden-gate, and her cross Pomeranian, which she had caught up in her arms, had the fiendish inspiration to yell in its struggles to be at them. Despair gives courage. Lady Margaret, looking round in her extremity, became aware of a ladder fixed against an apple-tree close by the Goody's door. Before she knew what she was about, she was up that ladder, Loup-loup barking in her arms, and the hounds bay-ing at her feet. *What* red tongues they had! and O, *what* cruel eyes! The steps of the ladder were rotten in parts, its purchase on the tree uncertain; the leaping of the hounds upon the lower rungs began to affect its balance—it tottered; Lady Margaret felt her fate was coming; she closed her eyes;



she tried to think of a prayer ; and O, by what mockery was it that only that for 'the High Court of Parliament' occurred to her bewildered senses?—a minute more—some sharp cracks of a whip—some howls of terror or of shame—Lady Margaret stopped at 'this time assembled,' and opened her eyes upon the handsomest young fellow in the world, reining-in his horse beneath her ladder and apologising for the annoyance he had freed her from. But what a position for the daughter of a hundred earls! In an apple-tree, upon a rotten ladder, encumbered with a basket of meat and a yelping dog, her dress torn, her ankles freely displayed to Squire Bigg's whips, who had just ridden up, and were busily engaged in driving off their clamorous pack. Such was the first meeting of Lady Margaret Vere with young Jack Irby of the Grange. But Jack Irby had by this time dismounted, and was offering his hand to assist Margaret from her perch. Confused, terrified, she came quickly down the ladder, dropped her dog and basket, and caught at the offered hand. 'My deliverer!' she cried, and broke into a fit of hysterical weeping. The position was ludicrous enough, but Jack Irby's good breeding did not desert him. 'Too happy to have rendered you the slightest assistance, Lady Margaret,' he said; 'meantime, let me introduce myself to you as one of the sons of Mr. Irby of the Grange, and permit me to offer you my arm, to lead you away from here.' Never was offered arm more welcome. Weak, bewildered, hysterical, Margaret took it with thankfulness, and in a few minutes more found herself quietly walking by Jack Irby's side, through the golden, autumn-scented lanes, on her way back to Vere Park. Great crises produce sudden intimacies,

and by the time they reached the avenue gates, Lady Margaret felt as if she had known Mr. Irby all her life, although, after ten years of formal visiting his mother at the Grange, she had never seen his face before; that face, as walking by his side she occasionally cast a stolen glance at it, seemed to her the face of an angel; though whether angels habitually wear scarlet coats and leather breeches I am sure I cannot affirm.

Jack Irby was, indeed, one of those splendid beauties whom it is impossible to look at without admiration. The scarlet and white of his complexion were so brilliant that it required his stalwart figure to prevent his looking effeminate; that stately figure escaped the charge of being 'only fit for a grenadier' by the classic outline of his perfect and regular features; and had he been otherwise plain, his dark-blue eyes alone *must* have redeemed him from the charge of plainness. Such as he was, his face was his fortune; for, one of the six sons of an impoverished squire of ancient family, he had little or no share of this world's goods; nor did he possess much education, for Squire Irby, finding his means prevented his giving his sons a really good education, wisely solved the difficulty by giving them none at all. They all, however, could read, write, and ride, and the ancient blood in their veins gave to them all the appearance of high-bred gentlemen. But I am leaving Lady Margaret and her companion all this time standing at her avenue gates. The lady could do nothing less than invite her preserver to come in and refresh, but the gentleman excused himself. He had business at home, and he felt sure Lady Margaret required some rest after her alarm. He would, if she allowed him, venture to call to inquire

after her health to-morrow. So the knight mounted and rode away, and the lady repaired to her bower, to think, more than she cared to confess to herself, of the hero of her morning's adventure. He reminded her, she fancied, of a picture in one of her favourite fairy-tales, of Prince Charming, a beautiful youth who rescued a lovely lady from an evil-minded dragon on the simple condition of turning into a hippopotamus every night. Could it be possible that Jack Irby might be in a similar predicament? How should she ever have the means of ascertaining?

She had asked him to call next morning, and he came, handsomer than ever, and full of polite inquiries after her health, her dog's health, and everybody else's health concerned. He had not sat with her half an hour, before a violent shower of rain came on. He rose to take his leave, but common gratitude forbade her to turn him out in such weather; she pressed him to stay, and join her and Rosamond Price at their midday meal. The rain continued, so he spent the afternoon with the ladies. Have you ever seen a cat looking at a bowl of cream placed just out of its reach? Have you ever seen a vulgar child gazing from outside into the delights of a pastry-cook's window? Have you ever caught a sportsman's eye on the 1st September, when the pleasant whirr of partridges' wings rises from the next turnip-field, just out of shot? All these you may have seen, and more also; still, you can never realise the expression with which Miss Price contemplated the handsome Jack Irby. Men's visits were, to this young person, what those of angels were to the patriarchs; so splendid a specimen of mankind had certainly never crossed her path before. Her eyes grew

quite round with surprise. Where had Lady Margaret picked him up? for what purpose? were there many more of the same sort about? and if so, how were they to be met with? These artless speculations were only cut short by the departure of their subject, amid much leave-taking, many graceful nothings from Lady Margaret to Mrs. Irby, on whom she hoped shortly to call, and a civil invitation to himself to come over again soon. So Jack took his departure, and when the ladies were left to themselves, Lady Margaret sat down with the conviction that those attractions which she so strongly objected to in Miss Price were becoming more *prononcée* and more entirely reprehensible than ever.

Why should I make a long story longer? It was the old story of a woman's heart awakening after she herself had believed it dead, the old conflict between pride and weakness commenced again; again, as usual in such struggles, the weaker won, and that faded woman's heart grew young within her bosom when she looked upon the manly beauty which had captivated her senses. Lady Margaret called more than once upon Mrs. Irby; civilities became constant between the Grange and the Park, until at last it became evident to the lookers-on that Jack Irby had only to ask to receive house and park, broad acres, rich pastures, gold, jewels, and the hand of the richest heiress in Surrey. It would be a great match for a son of Squire Irby of the Grange. Meantime, nobody thought of Rosamond Price. Nobody did I say? Well, *one* person did. I have said that Jack Irby was beautiful; but you know the proverb tells us it is better to be good than beautiful, and I am afraid to virtue poor Jack could lay small claim. Virtue, indeed, had never come his way; had

she done so, I have no doubt he would have received her civilly. Jack was civil to everyone; and to some people his civilities had brought no good. He may be excused, at all events, for finding that brilliancy and *embonpoint* which Lady Margaret condemned in Miss Price were vastly to his taste. Was it for this reason that he hesitated to appropriate the somewhat faded charms which could bring so much with them? There was no hesitation upon the part of his family, who openly denounced his backwardness in declaring himself. 'If you don't like the lady,' observed the Squire with much candour, 'you are sure to like the money. If it had been George there, or Ferdinand, who had such a chance as this, see if they wouldn't have jumped at the old cat, even if she had nine lives; but you, Jack, *you* to stay shilly-shallying in this manner! I can't understand a man being such a fool. And yet your mother tells me that you *really are* my son.' His brothers quite agreed in this sensible view of the matter, and chaffed the beauty of the family without mercy upon his maidenly bashfulness. His mother was averse to her son's marrying without love; still, she could not conceal from herself the immense advantages of the match. She looked into his face and sighed. 'She is a pretty woman still, my son,' said gentle Mrs. Irby. Thus adjured on all sides, Jack's hesitation (from whatever cause it came) vanished; and one bright December morning he proposed, and was accepted by Lady Margaret Vere. There was no hesitation with *her*, poor woman; though she was thirty-six and he was twenty-five, she loved the handsome young fellow with a tenderness, an unselfishness, which would have disgraced no maiden of seventeen. Just as he was, she

took him; she did not conceal her love, she did not protest her own unworthiness, for she felt in her heart that if she came to him with inferior gifts of beauty and youth, the devotion of her life would bring him amends. So their engagement was proclaimed, and Margaret had the satisfaction, piquant at all times to her, of rousing her sisters to wrath. Lady Cassilis and Lady Araminta Burton wept and raved, remonstrated and implored, talked at the same time of degradation and imbecility, and finally consented, under protest, to lend the light of their noble countenances to the wedding. Nor were the congratulations of Miss Price more enthusiastic; she received Lady Margaret's communication in stolid silence, and took the earliest opportunity of leaving the room. This did not surprise Lady Margaret; 'the girl was always half a fool,' she said to herself. What would she have said, I wonder, could she have seen Rosamond Price at that moment, as, with her black eyes flashing, her scarlet lips white with rage, she shook her fist at her own image in the glass. 'She, *she* to marry that beautiful creature! Horrid old thing!' said this modest and grateful young girl.

But the marriage *was* to be, the settlements were drawn out, the bridal-dress chosen, the fourteenth Earl Vere had consented to give away the bride, it wanted but a fortnight to the wedding-day, and certainly Jack Irby seemed to be no unreluctant bridegroom. In the light of her happy love, Margaret was a new creature; her bud might have faded early, but her blossom promised a completeness and a glow which no one could have expected in her prime. Had she been a more unlovely woman, I think the fulness of her love, the generosity with which she 'let all

the poms of the world go by,' and in her implicit faith and confidence looked only on the man she loved, would have touched a harder heart than Jack Irby's. She loved him, and she trusted him—that was enough for her. Meanwhile, the village gossips—for there are gossips, alas! in every village—declared that they thought it all very well for Mr. Irby to ride over early each morning to Vere Park, and spend the afternoon with the lady he was about to marry, but that it was not equally well for Miss Rosamond Price to meet him every morning in the fir-wood, through which lay his nearest way to the house; no doubt she might have messages from Lady Margaret, but these messages seemed to take a very long time to deliver, and it was a curious fact that the lover and the confidante, if confidante she was, never returned openly to the house together, but each went severally their separate way. 'It might be well,' said these gossips, 'if we could also repair to that fir-wood, and see what actually goes on. Mr. Irby we all know is no saint, my lady is not so young as she was, and *that* Miss Price has a rolling eye, if ever a girl had one. It is an uncomfortable state of things,' they said. What was the actual truth, I wonder?—not till the day when all secrets are revealed shall we ever know. Did he mean to marry the woman he did not love, but to whom he was bound in honour? Did he love, or did he mean to marry, or not marrying, did he still intend to love, that woman whom he met of a morning in the fir-wood? I am inclined to think that Jack Irby did not well know himself. On the one side was a woman whom he certainly did not dislike, who could bring him wealth, position, luxury, and boundless love; on the other, was a woman, younger and fairer

indeed, uneducated, unrefined, with whom a marriage was ruin, but whose sensuous beauty he might find it hard to withstand. Jack Irby had the reputation of being an honest fellow, and yet, I fear, he meant to make the most of both things—to make the advantageous marriage, yet keep the beauty, which, without a scruple, without an effort on his part, flung itself at his feet.

Of all these comments Margaret Vere knew nothing; had she known, I think that, strong in her love and faith, she would have smiled serenely, and scorned to mention them to the man whom she trusted. Her mind might be narrow, but her nature was not mean. She was essentially high-bred and unsuspicious, and once her confidence was given, it was given unreservedly, until the end. Besides, her happy love had changed her into a different woman; at Christmas she perceived a meaning in the lovely carol she had never found before—'Peace, good-will to all men.' She *wished* it from the bottom of her heart, and she saw it everywhere in the world where she had formerly despaired of finding it. How *could* she have been so blind? But now she walked upon enchanted ground; had anyone told her the frost-garment which the earth put on was woven of diamonds, she would have believed it, for what she saw she now believed in; of what she did not see, she hoped the best. So spring came, and with it came to her new meaning in the opening buds, new pathos in the early song of the birds, rare loveliness in the common snowdrop's bell, for was not the flower of her life budding anew for her? had not the dreary stagnation of her heart been regenerated, just when the earth arose in its fresh greenness from its barren and wintry pall? The willows



clothed themselves again in soft balls of golden down, the larches flung out again their emerald plumes, but in Margaret Vere's heart Hope, for the first time, put on her plumage of many colours—dyes which have not their origin on earth, and to whose delicacy the cunning touch of Nature herself cannot attain.

Late one spring afternoon, there were in the old house of Vere Park two natural pictures prettier than anything that would appear in the exhibitions that season. In a chamber above, a woman stood before a mirror, trying the effect of different flowers in her fair hair; there was no longer a want of animation in her pale-blue eyes, her thin cheek no longer required a touch of rouge. The light of hope, the glow of love, were there, and as the poor thing, satisfied with her last arrangement, gave a parting look at herself as she turned to leave the room, she seemed almost young and pretty again. Beneath, in the drawing-room, lit by the dusky fire-light only, a man stood before the fire; his handsome head was bent over the dark locks of the girl round whose waist his arm was clasped, her arms were round his neck, her full black eyes, bold no longer, were fixed upon his face; the glow of youth and health; the ruddy light of the fire shone upon them both as they stood, secured from observation by the gilded leaves of a tall Indian screen which stood between the fireplace and the door.

'Just six o'clock,' said the young man. 'My own Rose, only three dreary hours to wait until we meet again. Mind that the chaise will stop at the corner of Bysing-lane, just out of sight of Truman's cottage, at nine o'clock precisely.'

'And *then*, when we are together, shall you love me always just as you do now, Jack?' said the girl,

clasping her arms more closely round his neck.

'Love you?' said he fondly. 'Were such eyes as those made to be disliked?'

'But shall you love me *really*?' said the girl. 'Me only—*me*? Tell me once more that you have never cared for the cat upstairs; that it is only your poor little Rose you love.'

'Rose, and Rose only, and for ever!' answered he, as he bent down and kissed her lips.

Was it conscience that disturbed that guilty pair, or did a sigh float past them, faint as the sound of an expiring life? They started hastily apart, and Jack Irby rushed behind the Indian screen. No, it was conscience, it was fear—there was nothing there. Nevertheless, the spell was broken, that conscience-stricken couple for a few minutes more looked uneasily into each others' faces from two seats drawn suspiciously far asunder, and it was a relief to both when Lady Margaret's maid entered with a message from her mistress: 'Her head ached so badly, would Mr. Irby kindly excuse her that evening? she feared she would not be able to come down; but she would be glad to see Miss Price in her own room.' I think Mr. Irby was not sorry to be spared the society of *both* the objects of his wavering affections that night; he rose with some alacrity, and took Rosamond's hand. 'Good-night, Miss Price,' he said aloud; but in a voice that met her ear alone, he added, 'remember; *nine* o'clock, at the corner of Bysing-lane.'

Nine o'clock came, and the hour found Jack Irby waiting beside the chaise which stood in the shadow of the high hedges of Bysing-lane. He had managed matters cleverly enough, he thought. His groom, whom equality of age, long service, and many a scrape pardoned or

shared in, had rendered quite devoted to his master, had hired that chaise from the Bell at Ashford, on pretence of a wedding-party. To be sure, the chaise had not gone out without a careful lad to drive it; but the careful driver was also a lad who loved a spree, and he listened to the persuasions of his friend the groom, who urged him, instead of toiling all night along the Surrey lanes, to intrust his horses to *him*, and spend a jolly evening at the Horns at Grinstead, where before morning, without any trouble being given or any questions asked, horses and chaise should be returned to him safe and sound again. These arguments were not without their weight upon the careful lad, heavily backed as they were by a golden bribe, which, whilst it secured his complicity, secured his silence also. So, half-way between Ashford and Grinstead, the driver dismounted and found his way to the Horns, leaving Jack Irby's groom to drive to Bysing-lane, and join his master. Thence, it had been arranged, he was to drive in the cover of night to Grinstead, leave the lady safely at the house of his mother—herself a dependent of the Irbys of the Grange, and utterly devoted to them—then to drive out of the town again, and, skirting Grinstead, to reënter it from the London road, and give up the chaise at the Horns, before anyone was stirring there except his careful friend. This was all very well indeed, and very well calculated to baffle pursuit; but what next? Jack himself did not quite know. He supposed he should still marry Margaret; if he did, how kind he would be to the poor thing! she was a good creature in her way, and *very* fond of him, and he could keep it all from her knowledge; the devil of it was, that that girl would not wait until after the marriage, when it

would have been so much safer. Hang it all! thought Jack, a fellow ought not to be blamed; when such a fine girl as Rosamond throws herself at his head, what is he to do? She *would* have it, she *would* not wait to be asked, you know; and besides, who has not done the same? In spite of this excellent reasoning, Jack felt very uncomfortable. Rosamond did not come; he felt very cold, and he dared not light a cigar, or even stamp his feet and whistle, for fear of being seen or heard from Truman's cottage. And then the stars had contracted such an awkward habit of winking at him—he had never noticed their being so *very* bright before; surely they must know more than was good for them of what took place below; for the heavens looked to him as if they were full of eyes—honest, clear-sighted eyes too, that were not afraid of anyone seeing them. Certainly Jack did feel very uncomfortable.

'She came not, no, she came not, the night came on amain.' Ten o'clock struck, eleven o'clock, and still no muffled figure hurrying round the corner, no little feet in their high-heeled shoes came pattering down the lane. The night grew colder; the faithful groom, in spite of frequent nips of brandy, was nearly frozen on the box. Jack's sufferings increased. What *could* have happened? why didn't she come? if she did not come soon it would be too late, for the morning light must not find them there. He could scarcely suppose she would come now, that night; but what *could* have prevented her? had Margaret's headache increased? could it be possible she suspected anything? in that case he was likely to have a stormy interview to-morrow—everything would be explained to-morrow. He did not, however, think it possible he could be suspected; if he were, he must

trust to his fine eyes and winning tongue to get him out of the scrape. To-morrow, at any rate, he was *certain* to see them both. At that moment twelve o'clock struck, and the chimes of Ashford church rang out; clear and distinct they rang across the distant midnight air, and words seemed mingling in their chimes which he had never remarked before. 'Never again!' they said to Jack Irby; 'never again, never again!'

Rosamond found Lady Margaret Vere crushed up in all her gay attire among her pillows; certainly she seemed very ill, for her head was burning, and the hand which she drew back impatiently from Miss Price's touch felt cold as ice. Her eyes glittered with a strange fever, the tones of her voice sounded hoarse as she bade Miss Price sit down and read to her. 'What would you like me to read to you?' said Rosamond. 'The *Pilgrim's Progress—straight through!*' returned her protectress, with a laugh which chilled that young person's soul. The plans of Mr. Worldly Wiseman, the tremors of Mr. Despondency and his daughter Mrs. Muchafraid, at no time found much favour in the eyes of Miss Price. There was a book downstairs in the library which she thought vastly better reading; it was called the *Lives of Highwaymen and Pirates*; however, she sat down to her uncongenial task, with the reflection that if her tastes were fettered, her thoughts at all events were free, and could fly from that tiresome room to the hazel tassels which fringed the hedges of Bysing-lane, and to the handsome young lover who would soon be waiting for her there. Eight o'clock struck, but still found this reluctant pilgrim deep in her *Progress*. What on earth was she to do? It would take her fully twenty minutes to run to Bysing-lane, and there were some

poor little trinkets in her own room which she was loth to leave behind. If Margaret would only go to sleep!—but the hard, glittering eyes never left her face; if she attempted to pause in her reading, the unrelenting voice sternly bade her to 'Go on.' 'I wish the old cat were hanged!' thought this admirable young woman. At length her patience came to an end, she threw the book resolutely down—it was nearly half-past eight—and declared she had read herself into a fever; a little fresh air, she thought, might do her good; she would descend to the garden, and remain within call if Lady Margaret wanted her. 'I will go with you,' said Margaret, 'perhaps the air may do me good also;' she rose painfully as she spoke, and prepared to follow Miss Price from the room. 'Worse and worse!' said Rosamond to herself; 'but if I can only get her to the Yew-tree Walk, I can easily persuade her to sit down there, then slip behind one of the yew-trees, out of the side-gate, and before she can look round I shall be safely out of her clutches. What matter if I *do* keep Jack a few minutes waiting? he ought to wait hours for *me*.' So the ladies put on hood and cloak, and left the house. Margaret was all for walking up and down the terrace, Rosamond insisted upon the cool shades of the Yew-tree Walk. Lady Margaret's maid watched them from the window, the one, quick, resolute, erect; the other drooping and dejected, scarcely able to drag her feeble weight along. But Miss Price gained her point; to the Yew-tree Walk they went, and as she had foreseen, Lady Margaret returned to the house, nervous and weeping; her companion, she complained, had left her alone on a seat, and made an errand to the village a pretext for leaving her; she had waited long, but now her

head ached so badly; only let them put out the lights, and her maid must sleep in her room since Miss Price had not yet returned, she was too ill to be left alone.

Next morning she was worse—so much worse, indeed, that her maid did not like to tell her the news. Miss Price was missing; her bed had not been slept in, her clothes were undisturbed; clearly she had not returned to the house after leaving Lady Margaret in the garden last night. Vere Park, meantime, presented a scene of alarm and confusion; the gardens and woods were scoured, the river dragged; mounted messengers were despatched in every direction in search of Miss Price; the village constables kept continually describing a circle, which took rise in the Bell at Ashford and ended in the Spotted Pig at Grinstead; servants flitted to and fro in that state of comfortable excitement they always feel when trouble or sickness has fallen upon the heads of the house. 'He's a good-hearted chap that Jack Irby,' opined Lady Margaret's own maid to the cook; 'he turned that mortal pale when I told him of Miss Price's leaving my lady, and she so ill and all, that he had to sit down on one of the chairs in the front hall, and I went and fetched him a glass of brandy.' 'And what a handsome fellow he is!' replied the cook, who was sixty and sentimental. As little as anyone else could Jack account for the disappearance of Miss Price. Could this girl, who had been so lightly won, have broken her engagement in favour of another lover? She was just the sort of girl, he reflected, to have two strings to her bow; but *who* could the second string be? Men were not very plentiful at Vere Park. He had, at least, the satisfaction of finding that no one connected him with Rosamond's disappear-

ance; the received opinion was that Miss Price, who had a high temper, had had a tiff with her ladyship, who had a peevish one, and had taken herself off in a fit of the sulks until such time as she should advise herself to return. This belief in no way prevented the most active measures from being taken to discover the fugitive. Jack himself set every possible inquiry he could with safety on foot on his own account, but with the same result. The bounding step, the rich red lips, the sparkling black eyes, never came back to the gray old walls and terraces of Vere Park.

Some confused report there was about a coach having been seen in the neighbourhood on the night of Miss Price's disappearance, but there was no evidence to connect her with it; the careful driver kept his knowledge to himself; indeed, he had none to impart, as he did not know for whom he had been hired, or that there was any lady in the case. So, at last, the flight of Rosamond came to be a nine-days' wonder, merged in the greater importance of the dangerous illness of Lady Margaret Vere, who, all through these summer months, lay between life and death. The doctors shook their heads, but gave no name to her disease, for the springs of her existence seemed broken. Her maid declared she had aged *fearfully*; nothing roused her, nothing gave her pleasure. She refused her sister's offer of coming to nurse her. Mr. Irby's letters lay in a heap unopened by her bedside; her door was closed against his mother's visits; and when she struggled back to life again, it seemed to be actually against her will.

Spring had ripened into summer, summer had waned to autumn; the hills were bathed in soft, purple clouds of heather; the noisy laugh-



ter of the harvesters sounded from the golden fields; in the woods the sleepy fox-glove bells kept nodding at each other beside the yellowing fern; the jasmine was flinging its faint, falling stars in at Margaret's window when young Jack Irby rode, with a frowning brow, out from the Grange to Vere Park. His mind was full of the terrible things he meant to say to Margaret—very terrible, but, he hoped, persuasive also. She had declined his visits and left his letters unanswered, but she had, at last, consented to receive him at six that afternoon; and he trusted that, once he was in her presence, the old fascination would reassert itself. He thought little of Rosamond now, but much of his creditors, for this marriage had become a necessity to him.

A woman stood watching in the silence and dusk of that autumn evening behind the old gates of Vere Park. 'Are you Mr. Irby?' she asked. Jack hoped he was, and asked her to be so kind as to open the gate. 'If you are Mr. Irby, Lady Margaret Vere has told me to request you not to take the trouble of going up to the house; she will send you a note this evening.' Jack looked hard at the woman; she was plainly dressed and her veil was down; still, he could see that she looked old and wizened. Such messengers were as little to his taste as the message. Some impulse made him hesitate. 'Are you Lady Margaret's maid?' he said. The stranger shook her head. 'Her friend, then?' 'She has no friends,' the woman sadly said; and as he still stood irresolute, she turned away and vanished into the gloom of the avenue. Jack called, but she gave no sign of hearing; he shouted, still no answer came; he sprang from his horse and shook the iron gates—they were locked on the inside; cursing his

luck, he mounted again and rode thoughtfully home along those silent, dusky lanes. Late that night a servant in the Vere livery left for him a note, which he said required no answer. It contained only these words:

'I have looked upon your fatal face for the last time. Never attempt to see me again. No! I think you will not try when I tell you that the woman you saw this evening, whether servant or dependent you could not decide, was  
'MARGARET VERE.'

So Jack Irby's ship, which he had launched upon the deep waters with favouring winds, came back to him, through the indiscretion of its own pilot, rudderless and dismantled. Where was now his golden merchandise,—his purple sails, the frankincense and the myrrh? A few bare planks, a few bleak upright spars, were all that remained to him.

The breaking of Lady Margaret's engagement to Mr. Irby caused at first much scandal in the county; the magnates of Surrey felt affronted that a fact which had been formally announced to them should be as if it had never existed. Besides, they had looked forward to seeing one of the best houses in the county agreeably occupied; and they had the additional mortification of being specially invited to a ball which would never take place. Margaret had also asked the daughters of Lord Loraine and of Mr. Calverly of Calverly to be her bridesmaids, and these young ladies felt that the ignominy of their position was only second to that of being jilted themselves. In comparison with the injured feelings of a whole county, what signified the heartbroken woman at the Park or the disappointed family at the Grange? But soon they began to take a more cheerful view of things. Margaret, said they, could no

longer be considered an accountable person.

‘ Her mind  
Had wander’d from its dwelling; and  
her eyes,  
They had not their own lustre, but  
the look  
Which is not of the earth: she was  
become  
The queen of a fantastic realm; her  
thoughts  
Were combinations of disjointed  
things.’

Margaret's state was truly pitiable; if not actually mad, she was akin to madness; shut up in that old gray house, resolutely denying herself to visitors, her life passed in consuming pain, in regrets as cruel as they were unavailing. Sometimes she would remain for days and days in her own room, stretched in a state of apathy on her sofa, or crouched in a corner, fingering over and over again, with a jealous touch, her collection of treasures. These consisted of a hunting-whip, which Jack Irby had forgotten at Vere Park; of a withered rose, which had dropped out of his coat; a glove which he had worn; a ribbon of her own, which he had once carelessly tied round his throat: all his presents to her, all hers to him, had long since been returned. At other times she would awake from her torpor, and, reckless of cold or wet, would take to hurrying up and down the garden-walks with wild and fitful energy. The place she most affected was the gloomy Yew-tree-Walk, at the end of which she would sometimes sit for hours beside a disused well, said to be of fabulous depth. This well had been constructed by the eleventh Lord Vere, when that amiable nobleman (who had been ambassador at the court of Louis XIV.) ruined his family for two generations by attempting to reproduce the Grandes

Eaux of Versailles. His costly undertaking of course had proved a failure, and the twelfth earl, who hated his father and all his works, caused them all to be demolished excepting this well, which was to have been the source from whence fountains and cascades were to derive perennial glories. This alone remained; it owed its safety to its depth, which it was considered a useless expense to fill up. *There*, by its black and jagged mouth, would Margaret Vere sit for hours, gazing as intently into its depths as if she expected the phantom of her lost happiness to ascend in clouds of rainbow-tinted spray.

To the happy, Death comes quickly; from the miserable and the weary he delays his welcome step as long as he can; so it was not till the third autumn after that one when first she met Jack Irby, that Margaret lay upon her death-bed, thankful to know that *it was* her death-bed. Her sisters, when she no longer had the strength to prevent them, came to nurse her. Lady Cassilis, overpowered by the wreck before her, could do nothing for the first two days but cry quietly over her sister; but Lady Araminta Burton was cast in a sterner mould. She was a dull, decorous woman, of well-regulated mind, who had a great respect for the Bible, with a patronising regard for the apostles and prophets themselves. She condemned as unbelievers such of her acquaintance as did not attend church once on Sundays; consequently, she was horrified to discover that it was three years since her sister had been to church, and that during that time no clergyman had been admitted within the walls of Vere Park. So she spoke, in her verbose manner, to Margaret, about the beauty and the peace of true religion. ‘Peace!’ answered the poor thing; ‘how can there be

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peace for such as *me*? More and more shocked, Lady Araminta sent for the rector of the parish, and looked out the largest Bible which the library contained; it happened, by chance, to be the one in which her father, in his aristocratic hand, had recorded the births and ages of his three daughters. Fortified by these auxiliaries, Lady Araminta made her way into the room where Lady Cassilis sat by their dying sister. She waved aloft her huge Bible, as if it had been a censer, to dispel the evil clouds gathering over Margaret's brain. 'Speak,' she said, 'dear sister, to this worthy man; listen to the words of mercy and peace from this holy book.' 'Mercy?' said Margaret, 'mercy for *me*? Speak? yes, I *will* speak at last; but first send everybody from the room.' Lady Araminta looked surprised; but she ordered the servants into the dressing-room.

When the room was clear, Margaret rose upright in her bed. She turned her dying glance from one to another, and with one supreme effort she faltered out, 'You don't know *what* you are talking of—you don't know to *whom*. I have been a great sinner,' she said; 'a great sinner. They deceived me, and he betrayed me for *her*; but *I murdered her*—Rosa—Rosa Price—in the well at the bottom of the Yew-tree Walk. I pushed her in; and, O my God, *there she stands!*' and flinging up her wasted arms, with one piercing shriek she fell back among her pillows.

That cry struck terror to the hearts of the appalled listeners in the dressing-room. 'What a terrible thing it is that my mistress, who was always so quiet, should die so hard!' whispered the waiting-maid to the nurse. There was silence for a few moments within; then another shriek—a heavy fall; but it was only Lady Araminta

Burton, as she sank unconscious to the floor. For a moment more that awful silence lasted within the chamber, then Lady Cassilis rose from her seat beside the dead. Haggard, terrible, with outstretched hands, she advanced upon the clergyman. 'You have heard all,' she cried; 'spare us; the honour of our family, of my children, is in your hands. Spare us, as you hope for mercy yourself. If there was a criminal to punish, if there were restitution to be made, I would not ask it of you. As it is, spare us, and keep our secret now;' and Lady Cassilis knelt at his feet. Do you think that my father was wrong—for this clergyman was my father—in giving his promise and preserving their secret? I think not. If society were better than it is, there ought to be no such thing as a secret; but in this instance there was, as Lady Cassilis said, no justice to be done, no criminal to be brought to punishment, no survivor to whom reparation could be made. Had my father made public this wretched secret, which he had gathered from a dying woman's lips, he might have tarnished the honour of an ancient family, cruelly injured the two distressed women who threw themselves on his forbearance, but done good to no one living. Rosamond Price had taken her failings with her before a higher tribunal than public opinion, and the disclosure of the truth might have injured her reputation more than the mystery which now gathered round her fate. These considerations influenced my father then, and it was not until many years afterwards that, upon his dying bed, an aged man, last survivor of the actors in this dismal story, he confided to me, and to a brother clergyman, the secret so long concealed. If he was in error, he meant it for the best.

The neighbourhood were at first rather scandalised that they buried Lady Margaret in the open churchyard, not beneath the Vere chancel; but they attributed it to the heathenish request she had left in her will, by which she desired to be clothed in her coffin in the satin dress, and crowned with the orange-wreath, which had been sent home three years before. Jack Irby had deceived her, and she had rejected him living; dead, she would go forth his bride. That her sisters felt her loss most deeply no one doubted, for it was at that time that Lady Araminta's hair, so dark before, was first observed to be streaked with gray; at that time, too, the blight descended upon the sunny beauty of Lady Cassilis, which never completely passed away.

But the family decided that the dust of Margaret Vere was unfit to mingle with her honest, loyal ancestors. Her crime they forgave, but they could not forget its disgrace; it hung about her memory still. So, from that hour, the old house where this poor tragedy of a woman's life had been played out has been left desolate; the ivy has checked the jasmine at Margaret's window; grass grows thick upon the terrace-walks where Rosamond's springing step used to fall. But the well at the end of the Yew-tree Walk was arched over by the late Lord Vere, and above it he raised a gray stone cross. Why he

took the trouble to make this one improvement nobody could tell, for neither he nor his son have cared to spend a night in the lonely old house. So the owls hoot and the bats flit through the empty rooms where once a foolish woman dreamed away her life. But I think that Margaret has the best of it now, for within the church countless generations of the house of Vere lie mouldering together in the family fault. Within all is darkness and decay, without, in the churchyard, the sunbeams come, the rain-drops fall; in the summer the speedwell spreads its starry blossoms, in the winter the soft green mosses twine, the robin sits and sings above the grave of her who loved 'not wisely, but too well.'

But what, someone may ask, became of the superb beauty who had cost two women their lives?

Jack Irby married—not too well—and had sons and daughters. Their home was that of poverty and discontent,—a shrewish wife, a neglectful husband, the dinner of herbs without the sauce of love. Later in life I have seen him often—a coarse, purple-faced, deep-drinking, hard-riding squire. I know not whether he had ever suspected anything of the truth, but this I know—that after the hardest day's hunting, he would sooner ride miles out of his way home than pass the ancient avenue gates or the dark fir-woods of Vere Park.



## DOCTOR FEVERSHAM'S STORY.

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'I HAVE made a point all my life,' said the Doctor, 'of believing nothing of the kind.'

Much ghost-talk by firelight had been going on in the library at Fordwick Chase, when Doctor Feversham made this remark.

'As much as to say,' observed Amy Fordwick, 'that you are afraid to tackle the subject, because you pique yourself on being strong-minded, and are afraid of being convinced against your will.'

'Not precisely, young lady. A man convinced against his will is in a different state of mind from mine in matters like these. But it is true that cases in which the supernatural element appears at first sight to enter are so numerous in my profession, that I prefer accepting only the solutions of science, so far as they go, to entering on any wild speculations which it would require more time than I should care to devote to them to trace to their origin.'

'But without entering fully into the why and wherefore, how can you be sure that the proper treatment is observed in the numerous cases of mental hallucination which must come under your notice?' inquired Latimer Fordwick, who was studying for the Bar.

'I content myself, my young friend, with following the rules laid down for such cases, and I generally find them successful,' answered the old Doctor.

'Then you admit that cases have occurred within your knowledge of which the easiest apparent solution could be one which involved

a belief in supernatural agencies?' persisted Latimer, who was rather prolix and pedantic in his talk.

'I did not say so,' said the Doctor.

'But of course he meant us to infer it,' said Amy. 'Now, my dear old Doctor, do lay aside professional dignity, and give us one good ghost-story out of your personal experience. I believe you have been dying to tell one for the last hour, if you would only confess it.'

'I would rather not help to fill that pretty little head with idle fancies, dear child,' answered the old man, looking fondly at Amy, who was his especial pet and darling.

'Nonsense! You know I am even painfully unimaginative and matter-of-fact; and as for idle fancies, is it an idle fancy to think you like to please me?' said Amy coaxingly.

'Well, after all, you have been frightening each other with so many thrilling tales for the last hour or two, that I don't suppose I should do much harm by telling you a circumstance which happened to me when I was a young man, and has always rather puzzled me.'

A murmur of approval ran round the party. All disposed themselves to listen; and Doctor Feversham, after a prefatory pinch of snuff, began.

'In my youth I resided for some time with a family in the north of England, in the double capacity of secretary and physician. While I was going through the hospitals of

Paris I became acquainted with my employer, whom I will call Sir James Collingham, under rather peculiar circumstances, which have nothing to do with my story. He had an only daughter, who was about sixteen when I first entered the family, and it was on her account that Sir James wished to have some person with a competent knowledge of medicine and physiology as one of his household. Miss Collingham was subject to fits of a very peculiar kind, which threw her into a sort of trance, lasting from half an hour to three or even four days, according to the severity of the visitation. During these attacks she occasionally displayed that extraordinary phenomenon which goes by the name of clairvoyance. She saw scenes and persons who were far distant, and described them with wonderful accuracy. Though quite unconscious of all outward things, and apparently in a state of the deepest insensibility, she would address remarks to those present which bore reference to the thoughts then occupying their minds, though they had given them no outward expression; and her remarks showed an insight into matters which had perhaps been carefully kept secret, which might truly be termed preternatural. Under these circumstances, Sir James was very unwilling to bring her into contact with strangers when it could possibly be avoided; and the events which first brought us together, having also led to my treating Miss Collingham rather successfully in a severe attack of her malady, induced her father to offer me a position in his household which, as a young, friendless man, I was very willing to accept.

‘Collingham-Westmore was a very ancient house of great extent, and but indifferently kept in repair. The country surrounding it

is of great natural beauty, thinly inhabited, and, especially at the time I speak of, before railways had penetrated so far north, somewhat lonely and inaccessible. A group of small houses clustered round the village church of Westmorton, distant about three miles from the mansion of the Collingham family; and a solitary posting-house, on what was then the great north road, could be reached by a horseman in about an hour, though the only practicable road for carriages was at least fifteen miles from the highway to Collingham-Westmore. Wild and lovely in the eyes of an admirer of nature were the hills and “cloughs” among which I pursued my botanical studies for many a long, silent summer day. My occupations at the mansion—everybody called it the mansion, and I must do so from force of habit, though it sounds rather like a house-agent’s advertisement—were few and light; the society was not particularly to my taste, and the fine old library only attracted me on rainy days, of which, truth to say, we had our full share.

‘The Collingham family circle comprised a maiden aunt of Sir James’s, Miss Patricia, a stern and awful specimen of the female sex in its fossil state; her ward, Miss Henderson, who, having long passed her pupilage, remained at Collingham-Westmore in the capacity of *gouvernante* and companion to the young heiress; the heiress aforesaid, and myself. A priest—did I say that the Collinghams still professed the old religion?—came on Sundays and holidays to celebrate mass in the gloomy old chapel; but neighbours there were none, and only about half-a-dozen times during the four years I was an inmate of the mansion were strangers introduced into the family party.’

'How dreadfully dull it must have been!' exclaimed Amy sympathetically.

'It *was* dull,' answered the Doctor. 'Even with my naturally cheerful disposition, and the course of study with which I methodically filled up all my leisure hours except those devoted to out-of-door exercise, the gloom of the old mansion weighed upon me till I sometimes felt that I must give up my situation at all risks, and return to the world, though it were to struggle with poverty and friendlessness.'

'There was no lack of dismal legends and superstitions connected with the mansion, and every trifling circumstance that occurred was twisted into an omen or presage, whether of good or evil, by the highly-wrought fancy of Miss Patricia. These absurdities, together with the past grandeur of their house, and the former glories of their religion, formed the staple subjects of conversation when the family was assembled; and as I became more intimately acquainted with the state of my patient, I felt convinced that the atmosphere of gloomy superstition in which she had been reared had fostered, even if it had not altogether been the cause of, her morbid mental and bodily condition.'

'Among the many legends connected with the mansion, one seemed to have a peculiar fascination for Miss Collingham, perhaps because it was the most ghastly and repulsive. One wing of the house was held to be haunted by the spirit of an ancestress of the family, who appeared in the shape of a tall woman, with one hand folded in her white robe and the other pointing upwards. It was said, that in a room at the end of the haunted wing this lady had been foully murdered by her jealous husband. The window of

the apartment overhung the wild wooded side of one of the "cloughs" common in the country; and tradition averred that the victim was thrown from this window by her murderer. As she caught hold of the sill in a last frantic struggle for life, he severed her hand at the wrist, and the mutilated body fell, with one fearful shriek, into the depth below. Since then, a white shadowy form has for ever been sitting at the fatal window, or wandering along the deserted passages of the haunted wing with the bleeding stump folded in her robe; and in moments of danger or approaching death to any member of the Collingham family, the same long, wild shriek rises slowly from the wooded cliff and peals through the mansion; while to different individuals of the house, a pale hand has now and then been visible, laid on themselves or some other of the family, a never-failing omen of danger or death.

'I need not tell you how false and foolish all this dreary superstition appeared to me; and I exerted all my powers of persuasion to induce Miss Patricia to dwell less on these and similar themes in the presence of Miss Collingham. But there seemed to be something in the very air of the gloomy old mansion which fostered such delusions; for when I spoke to Father O'Connor the priest, and urged on him the pernicious effect which was thus produced on my patient's mind, I found him as fully imbued with the spirit of credulity as the most hysterical housemaid of them all. He solemnly declared to me that he had himself repeatedly seen the pale lady sitting at the fatal window, when on his way to and from his home beyond the hills; and moreover, that on the death of Lady Collingham, which occurred at her daughter's birth, he had heard the long,

shrill death-scream echo through the mansion while engaged in the last offices of the Church by the bedside of the dying lady.

‘So I found it impossible to fight single-handed against these adverse influences, and could only endeavour to divert the mind of my patient into more healthy channels of thought. In this I succeeded perfectly. She became an enthusiastic botanist, and our rambles in search of the rare and lovely specimens which were to be found among the woods and moors surrounding her dwelling did more for her health, both of body and mind, than all the medical skill I could bring to bear on her melancholy case.

‘Four years had elapsed since I first took up my abode at Collingham-Westmore. Miss Collingham had grown from a sickly child into a singularly graceful young woman, full of bright intelligence, eager for information, and with scarcely an outward trace remaining of her former fragile health. Still those mysterious swoons occasionally visited her, forming an insurmountable obstacle to her mingling in general society, which she was in all other respects so well fitted to adorn. They occurred without any warning or apparent cause; one moment she would be engaged in animated conversation, and the next, white and rigid as a statue, she would fall back in her chair insensible to all outward objects, but rapt and carried away into a world of her own, whose visions she would sometimes describe in glowing language, although she retained no recollection whatever of them when she returned, as suddenly and at as uncertain a period, to her normal condition. On one of these occasions we were sitting, after dinner, in a large apartment called the summer dining-room. Fruit and wine were on the table,

and the last red beams of the setting sun lighted up the distant woods, which were in the first flush of their autumn glory. I turned to remark on the beautiful effect of light to Miss Collingham, and at the very moment I did so she fell back in one of her strange swoons. But instead of the death-like air which her features usually assumed, a lovely smile lighted them up, and an expression of ecstasy made her beauty appear for the moment almost superhuman. Slowly she raised her right hand, and pointed in the direction of the setting sun. “He is coming,” she said in soft clear tones; “life and light are coming with him,—life and light and liberty!”

‘Her hand fell gently by her side; the rapt expression faded from her countenance, and the usual death-like blank overspread it. This trance passed away like others, and by midnight the house was profoundly still. Soon after that hour a vociferous peal at the great hall-bell roused most of the inmates from sleep. My rooms were in a distant quarter of the house, and a door opposite to that of my bedroom led to the haunted wing, but was always kept locked. I started up on hearing a second ring, and looked out, in hopes of seeing a servant pass, and ascertaining the cause of this unusual disturbance. I saw no one, and after listening for a while to the opening of the hall-door, and the sound of distant voices, I made up my mind that I should be sent for if wanted, and reëntered my room. As I was closing the door, I was rather startled to see a tall object, of grayish-white colour and indistinct form, issue from the gallery whose door, as I said before, had always been locked in my recollection. For a moment I felt as though rooted to the spot, and a strange sensation crept over me. The next, all trace



of the appearance had vanished, and I persuaded myself that what I had seen must have been some effect of light from the open door of my room.

'The cause of the nightly disturbance appeared at breakfast on the following morning in the shape of a remarkably handsome young man, who was introduced by Sir James as his nephew, Don Luis de Cabral, the son of an only sister long dead, who had married a Spaniard of high rank. Don Luis showed but little trace of his southern parentage. If I may so express it, all the depth and warmth of colouring in that portion of his blood which he inherited from his Spanish ancestors came out in the raven-black hair and large lustrous dark eyes, which impressed you at once with their uncommon beauty. For the rest, he was a fine well-grown young man, no darker in complexion than an Englishman might well be, and with a careless, happy boyishness of manner, which won immediately on the regard of strangers, and rendered his presence in the house like that of a perpetual sunbeam. We all wondered, after a little while, what we had done before Luis came amongst us. He was as a son to Sir James; Miss Patricia softened to this new and pleasing interest in her colourless existence as I could not have believed it was in her fossilised nature to do; Miss Henderson became animated, almost young, under the reviving influence of the youth and joyousness of our new inmate; and I own that I speedily attached myself with a warm and affectionate regard to the happy, unselfish nature that seemed to brighten all who came near it.

'But the most remarkable effect of the presence of Don Luis de Cabral among us was visible in Miss Collingham. "Love at first sight," often considered as a mere

phrase, was, in the case of these two young creatures, an unmistakable reality. From the moment of their first meeting, the cousins were mutually drawn towards each other; and seeing the bright and wonderful change wrought by the presence of Don Luis in Blanche Collingham, I could not but remember, with the interest that attaches to a curious psychological phenomenon, the words she uttered in her trance on the eve of his arrival. "Life, light, and liberty," indeed, appeared given to all that was best and brightest in her nature. Her health improved visibly, and her beauty, always touching, became radiant in its full development. My duties towards her were now merely nominal; and when, about two months later, Sir James announced to me her approaching marriage, and confessed that it was with this object he had invited Don Luis to come and make the acquaintance of his English relations, the strong opinions I entertained against the marriage of first cousins, and also on the especial inadvisability of any project of marriage in the case of Miss Collingham, could not prevent my hearty rejoicing in the fair prospect of happiness in which two persons who deeply interested me were indulging.

'Winter set in early and severely that year among our northern hills, and with a view to Blanche's removal from its withering influence, which I always considered prejudicial to her, the preparations for the marriage were hurried on, and the ceremony was fixed to take place about the middle of December. The travelling-carriage which was to convey the young couple on their way southwards was to arrive at the nearest railway-station—then more than thirty miles distant—a week before the marriage; and as some important portions of the trousseau,

together with a valuable package of jewels intended by Don Luis as presents for his bride, were expected at the same time, the young man announced his intention of riding across the hills to —, in order to superintend the conveyance of the carriage and its contents along the rough mountain roads that it must traverse.

‘We were all sitting around the great fireplace in the winter parlour on the evening before his departure. Miss Collingwood had been languid and depressed throughout the day, and often adverted to the long wintry ride he was to undertake in a strain of apprehension at which Don Luis laughed gaily. To divert her mind, he recounted various adventures which had befallen him in foreign lands with a vigorous simplicity of description which enchained her attention and interested us all.

‘Suddenly, so sitting, Miss Collingham leaned forward, and in a changed, eager voice exclaimed, “Luis, take away your hand from your throat!”

‘We looked. Luis’ hands were lying one over the other on his knee in a careless attitude that was habitual to him.

“Take it away, I say! O, take it away!”

‘Miss Collingham started to her feet as she uttered these words almost in a shriek, and then fell back rigid and senseless, her outstretched hand still pointing to her betrothed.

‘The fit was a severe one, but by morning it had yielded to remedies, and Luis set off early on his ride, to make the most of the short daylight, and intending to return with the carriage on the morrow. All that day Miss Collingham remained in a half-conscious state. It was a dreary day of gloom, with a piercing north wind, and towards evening the snow began to fall in

those close, compact flakes which forebode a heavy storm. We were glad to think that Luis must have reached his destination before it began; but when the next morning dawned on a wide expanse of snow, and the air was still thick with fast-falling flakes, it was feared that the state of the roads would preclude all hope of the arrival of the carriage on that day.

‘My patient took no heed of the untoward state of the weather. She was still in a drowsy condition, very unlike that which usually succeeded her attacks, and Miss Henderson, who had watched by her through the night, told me she spoke more than once in a strange, excited manner, as though carrying on a conversation with someone whom she appeared to see by her bedside. As the good lady, however, could give but a very imperfect and incoherent account of what had passed, I was left in some doubt as to whether Miss Collingham had seen more or Miss Henderson less than there really was to be seen, as I had before had reason to believe that she was not a very vigilant nurse.

‘So the hours went on, and night closed in. Sir James began to feel some uneasiness at the nonappearance, not only of Don Luis, but also of the priest, who was to have arrived at Collingham-Westmore on that day.

‘On questioning some of the servants who had been out of the house, the absence of Father O’Connor at least was satisfactorily accounted for: they all declared that it would be quite impossible for those best acquainted with the hills to find their way across them in the blinding drifts which had never ceased throughout the day. We concluded that Father O’Connor and Don Luis were alike storm-stayed, and had no remedy but patience.

'Late in the evening—it must have been near midnight—I was in Miss Collingham's dressing-room with Miss Patricia, who intended to watch by her through the night. We were talking by the fire of the snow-storm, which still continued, and of the hindrance it might prove to the marriage—the day fixed for which was now less than a week distant—when we heard a voice in the adjoining room, where we imagined the object of our care to be sleeping. We went in. Miss Collingham was sitting up in bed, her eyes wide open, in one of her rigid fits. She was speaking rapidly in a low tone, unlike her usual voice.

"You cannot get through all that snow," she said. "Get help; there are men not far off with spades. O, be careful! You are off the road! Stop, stop! that is the way to Armstrong's Clough. Does not the postboy know the road? He is bewildered. I tell you it is madness to go on. See, one of the horses has fallen; he kicks—he will hit you! O, how dark it is! And the snow covers your lantern, and you cannot see the edge. Now the horse is up again, but he cannot go on. Do not beat him, Luis; it is not his fault, poor beast; the snow is too thick, and you are on rough ground. Now he rears—he backs—the other one backs also—the wheel of the carriage is over the edge—ah!"

'The scream with which these wild hurried words ended seemed to be taken up and echoed from a distance. Miss Patricia stared at me with a ghastly white face of horror, and I felt my blood curdle as that long, shrill, unearthly shriek pealed through the silent passages. It grew louder and nearer, and seemed to sweep through the room, dying away in the opposite direction. Miss Patricia fell forward without a word in a dead faint.

'I looked at Miss Collingham;

she had not moved, or shown any sign of hearing or heeding that awful sound. In a few seconds the room was filled with terrified women, roused from their sleep by the weird cry which rang through the house. Miss Patricia was conveyed by some of them to her own room, where, after much difficulty, we restored her to consciousness. Her first act was to grasp me by the arm.

"Mr. Feversham, for the love of the Holy Virgin do not leave me! I have seen that which I cannot look upon and live."

'I soothed her as best I might, and at last persuaded her to allow me to leave her with her own maid in order to visit my other patient, promising to return shortly.

'I found no change whatever in Miss Collingham. Sir James was in the room trying to establish some degree of calmness and order among the terrified women. We succeeded in persuading most of them to take a restorative and return to bed, and leaving two of the most self-possessed to watch beside Miss Collingham, who was still completely insensible, we went together to Miss Patricia's room.

"Brother, I have seen her!" she exclaimed on Sir James's entrance.

"Seen who, my dear Patricia?"

"The pale lady—the spectre of our house," she replied, shuddering from head to foot. "She passed through the room, her hand upraised, and the blood-spots on her garment. O James! my time is come, and Father O'Connor is not here."

'Sir James did not attempt to combat his sister's superstitious terrors, but appeared, on the contrary, almost as deeply impressed as herself, and questioned her closely about the apparition. Her answers led to some mention of the strange vision which Miss Collingham was describing in her

trance just before the scream was heard. At Sir James's request I put down in writing, as nearly as I could remember, all she had said, and so great was the impression it made on my mind that I believe I recalled her very words. Knowing all we did of her abnormal condition while in a state of trance, it was impossible not to fear that she might have been describing a scene that was actually occurring at the time; and Sir James determined to send out a party, as soon as daylight came, on the road by which Don Luis must arrive.

'The morning dawned brightly, with a keen frost, and several men were sent off along the road to — with the first rays of light.

'Some hours afterwards Father O'Connor arrived, having made his way with considerable difficulty across the hill. Miss Patricia claimed his first attention, for my unhappy charge remained senseless and motionless as ever.

'After a long conference, he came to me with grave looks.

"She is at the window this day," he said, shaking his head sorrowfully, when I had told him my share of the last night's singular experiences. "The pale lady is there; I saw her as I came by the bridge as plainly as I now see you. We shall have evil tidings of that poor lad before nightfall, or I am strangely mistaken."

'Evil tidings indeed they were that reached us on the return of some of the exploring-party. They were first attracted from following as nearly as they could the line of road, blocked as it was with drifts of snow, by hearing the howling of a dog at some little distance, in the direction of the precipitous ravine which went by the name of "Armstrong's Clough." Following the sound, they came upon traces of wheels in the hill-side,

where no carriage could have gone had it not been for the deep snow which concealed and smoothed away the inequalities of the ground. These marks were traced here and there till they led to the verge of the precipice, where a struggle had evidently taken place, and masses of snow had been dislodged and fallen into the ravine.

'Looking below, the only thing they could see in the waste of snow was a little dog, who was known to be in the habit of running with the post-horses from —, which was scraping wildly in the snow and filling the air with its dismal howlings. A considerable circuit had to be made before the bottom of the clough could be reached, and then the whole tragedy was revealed. There lay the broken carriage, the dead horses, and two stiffened corpses under the snow, that had drifted over and around them.

'I need not pursue the melancholy story; I was an old fool for telling it to you,' said the Doctor.

'But Miss Collingham — what became of her?' asked an eager listener.

'Well, she did not recover,' answered the Doctor, with a slight trembling in his voice. 'It was a sad matter altogether; and within a short time she lay beside her betrothed in the family vault below the chapel. Sir James broke up his establishment and went abroad, and I never saw any of the family again.'

'And what did you do, Doctor?'

'I went to London, to seek my fortune as best I might; and I hope you may all prosper as well, my young friends.'

'And is it all really true?' asked Amy, who had listened with breathless attention.

'That is the worst of it; it really is,' said the Doctor.



## THE SECRET OF THE TWO PLASTER CASTS.

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YEARS before the accession of her Majesty Queen Victoria, and yet at not so remote a date as to be utterly beyond the period to which the reminiscences of our middle-aged readers extend, it happened that two English gentlemen sat at table on a summer's evening, after dinner, quietly sipping their wine and engaged in desultory conversation. They were both men known to fame. One of them was a sculptor whose statues adorned the palaces of princes, and whose chiselled busts were the pride of half the nobility of his nation; the other was no less renowned as an anatomist and surgeon. The age of the anatomist might have been guessed at fifty, but the guess would have erred on the side of youth by at least ten years. That of the sculptor could scarcely be more than five-and-thirty. A bust of the anatomist, so admirably executed as to present, although in stone, the perfect similitude of life and flesh, stood upon a pedestal opposite to the table at which sat the pair, and at once explained at least one connecting-link of companionship between them. The anatomist was exhibiting for the criticism of his friend a rare gem which he had just drawn from his cabinet: it was a crucifix magnificently carved in ivory, and incased in a setting of pure gold.

'The carving, my dear sir,' observed Mr. Fiddyes, the sculptor, 'is indeed, as you say, exquisite. The muscles are admirably made out, the flesh well modelled, won-

derfully so for the size and material; and yet—by the bye, on this point you must know more than I—the more I think upon the matter, the more I regard the artistic conception as utterly false and wrong.'

'You speak in a riddle,' replied Dr. Carnell; 'but pray go on, and explain.'

'It is a fancy I first had in my student-days,' replied Fiddyes. 'Conventionality, not to say a most proper and becoming reverence, prevents people by no means ignorant from considering the point. But once think upon it, and you at least, of all men, must at once perceive how utterly impossible it would be for a victim nailed upon a cross by hands and feet to preserve the position invariably displayed in figures of the Crucifixion. Those who so portray it fail in what should be their most awful and agonising effect. Think for one moment, and imagine, if you can, what would be the attitude of a man, living or dead, under this frightful torture.'

'You startle me,' returned the great surgeon, 'not only by the truth of your remarks, but by their obviousness. It is strange indeed that such a matter should have so long been overlooked. The more I think upon it the more the bare idea of actual crucifixion seems to horrify me, though Heaven knows I am accustomed enough to scenes of suffering. How would you represent such a terrible agony?'

'Indeed I cannot tell,' replied

the sculptor; 'to guess would be almost vain. The fearful strain upon the muscles, their utter helplessness and inactivity, the frightful swellings, the effect of weight upon the racked and tortured sinews, appal me too much even for speculation.'

'But this,' replied the surgeon, 'one might think a matter of importance, not only to art, but, higher still, to religion itself.'

'Maybe so,' returned the sculptor. 'But perhaps the appeal to the senses through a true representation might be too horrible for either the one or the other.'

'Still,' persisted the surgeon, 'I should like—say for curiosity—though I am weak enough to believe even in my own motive as a higher one—to ascertain the effect from actual observation.'

'So should I, could it be done, and of course without pain to the object, which, as a condition, seems to present at the outset an impossibility.'

'Perhaps not,' mused the anatomist; 'I think I have a notion. Stay—we may contrive this matter. I will tell you my plan, and it will be strange indeed if we two cannot manage to carry it out.'

The discourse here, owing to the rapt attention of both speakers, assumed a low and earnest tone, but had perhaps better be narrated by a relation of the events to which it gave rise. Suffice it to say that the Sovereign was more than once mentioned during its progress, and in a manner which plainly told that the two speakers each possessed sufficient influence to obtain the assistance of royalty, and that such assistance would be required in their scheme.

The shades of evening deepened while the two were still conversing. And leaving this scene, let us cast one hurried glimpse at

another taking place contemporaneously.

Between Pimlico and Chelsea, and across a canal of which the bed has since been used for the railway terminating at Victoria Station, there was at the time of which we speak a rude timber footway, long since replaced by a more substantial and convenient erection, but then known as the Wooden Bridge. It was named shortly afterwards Cut-throat Bridge, and for this reason.

While Mr. Fiddyes and Dr. Carnell were discoursing over their wine, as we have already seen, one Peter Starke, a drunken Chelsea pensioner, was murdering his wife upon the spot we have last indicated. The coincidence was curious.

In those days the punishment of criminals followed closely upon their conviction. The Chelsea pensioner whom we have mentioned was found guilty one Friday and sentenced to die on the following Monday. He was a sad scoundrel, impenitent to the last, glorying in the deeds of slaughter which he had witnessed and acted during the series of campaigns which had ended just previously at Waterloo. He was a tall, well-built fellow enough, of middle age, for his class was not then, as now, composed chiefly of veterans, but comprised many young men, just sufficiently disabled to be unfit for service. Peter Starke, although but slightly wounded, had nearly completed his term of service, and had obtained his pension and presentment to Chelsea Hospital. With his life we have but little to do, save as regards its close, which we shall shortly endeavour to describe far more veraciously, and at some greater length than set forth in the brief account which satisfied the public of his own day, and

which, as embodied in the columns of the few journals then appearing, ran thus :

‘On Monday last Peter Starke was executed at Newgate for the Murder at the Wooden Bridge, Chelsea, with four others for various offences. After he had been hanging only for a few minutes a respite arrived, but although he was promptly cut down, life was pronounced to be extinct. His body was buried within the prison walls.’

Thus far history. But the conciseness of history far more frequently embodies falsehood than truth. Perhaps the following narration may approach more nearly to the facts.

A room within the prison had been, upon that special occasion and by high authority, allotted to the use of Dr. Carnell and Mr. Fiddyes, the famous sculptor, for the purpose of certain investigations connected with art and science. In that room Mr. Fiddyes, while wretched Peter Starke was yet swinging between heaven and earth, was busily engaged in arranging a variety of implements and materials, consisting of a large quantity of plaster-of-Paris, two large pails of water, some tubs, and other necessities of the moulder’s art. The room contained a large deal table, and a wooden cross, not neatly planed and squared at the angles, but of thick, narrow, rudely-sawn oaken plank, fixed by strong heavy nails. And while Mr. Fiddyes was thus occupied, the executioner entered, bearing upon his shoulders the body of the wretched Peter, which he flung heavily upon the table.

‘You are sure he is dead?’ asked Mr. Fiddyes.

‘Dead as a herring,’ replied the other. ‘And yet just as warm and limp as if he had only fainted.’

‘Then go to work at once,’ re-

plied the sculptor, as turning his back upon the hangman he resumed his occupation.

The ‘work’ was soon done. Peter was stripped and nailed upon the timber, which was instantly propped against the wall.

‘As fine a one as ever I see,’ exclaimed the executioner, as he regarded the defunct murderer with an expression of admiration, as if at his own handiwork, in having abruptly demolished such a magnificent animal. ‘Drops a good bit for’ard, though. Shall I tie him up round the waist, sir?’

‘Certainly not,’ returned the sculptor. ‘Just rub him well over with this oil, especially his head, and then you can go. Dr. Carnell will settle with you.’

‘All right, sir.’

The fellow did as ordered, and retired without another word ; leaving this strange couple, the living and the dead, in that dismal chamber.

Mr. Fiddyes was a man of strong nerve in such matters. He had been too much accustomed to taking posthumous casts to trouble himself with any sentiment of repugnance at his approaching task of taking what is called a ‘piece-mould’ from a body. He emptied a number of bags of the white powdery plaster-of-Paris into one of the larger vessels, poured into it a pail of water, and was carefully stirring up the mass, when a sound of dropping arrested his ear.

*Drip, drip.*

‘There’s something leaking,’ he muttered, as he took up a second pail, and emptying it, again stirred the composition.

*Drip, drip, drip.*

‘It’s strange,’ he soliloquised, half aloud. ‘There is no more water, and yet—’

The sound was heard again.

He gazed at the ceiling ; there was no sign of damp. He turned

his eyes to the body, and something suddenly caused him a violent start. The murderer was bleeding.

The sculptor, spite of his command over himself, turned pale. At that moment the head of Starke moved—clearly moved. It raised itself convulsively for a single moment; its eyes rolled, and it gave vent to a subdued moan of intense agony. Mr. Fiddyes fell fainting on the floor as Dr. Carnell entered. It needed but a glance to tell the doctor what had happened, even had not Peter just then given vent to another low cry. The surgeon's measures were soon taken. Locking the door, he bore a chair to the wall which supported the body of the malefactor. He drew from his pocket a case of glittering instruments, and with one of these, so small and delicate that it scarcely seemed larger than a needle, he rapidly, but dexterously and firmly, touched Peter just at the back of the neck. There was no wound larger than the head of a small pin, and yet the head fell instantly as though the heart had been pierced. The doctor had divided the spinal cord, and Peter Starke was dead indeed.

A few minutes sufficed to recall the sculptor to his senses. He at first gazed wildly upon the still suspended body, so painfully recalled to life by the rough venesection of the hangman and the subsequent friction of anointing his body to prevent the adhesion of the plaster.

'You need not fear now,' said Dr. Carnell; 'I assure you he is dead.'

'But he *was* alive, surely!'

'Only for a moment, and even that scarcely to be called life—mere muscular contraction, my dear sir, mere muscular contraction.'

The sculptor resumed his labour. The body was girt at various cir-

cumferences with fine twine, to be afterwards withdrawn through a thick coating of plaster, so as to separate the various pieces of the mould, which was at last completed; and after this Dr. Carnell skilfully flayed the body, to enable a second mould to be taken of the entire figure, showing every muscle of the outer layer.

The two moulds were thus taken. It is difficult to conceive more ghastly appearances than they presented. For sculptor's work they were utterly useless; for no artist except the most daring of realists would have ventured to indicate the horrors which they presented. Fiddyes refused to receive them. Dr. Carnell, hard and cruel as he was, for kindness' sake, in his profession, was a gentle, genial father of a family of daughters. He received the casts, and at once consigned them to a garret, to which he forbade access. His youngest daughter, one unfortunate day, during her father's absence, was impelled by feminine curiosity—perhaps a little increased by the prohibition—to enter the mysterious chamber.

Whether she imagined in the pallid figure upon the cross a celestial rebuke for her disobedience, or whether she was overcome by the mere mortal horror of one or both of those dreadful casts, can now never be known. But this is true: she became a maniac.

The writer of this has more than once seen (as, no doubt, have many others) the plaster effigies of Peter Starke, after their removal from Dr. Carnell's to a famous studio near the Regent's Park. It was there that he heard whispered the strange story of their origin. Sculptor and surgeon are now both long since dead, and it is no longer necessary to keep THE SECRET OF THE TWO PLASTER CASTS.



X

## OLD-YEAR'S NIGHT.

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I.

THE windy trouble of the western sky  
Has all died out, save one long line of fire  
And hark ! the breeding north sweeps sadly by  
And moans about the poplar's gusty spire.

II.

No snow to-night. This pit'less wind alone  
Betwixt the poor pinch'd earth and callous sky  
"Old year," it cries, shrill mock'ry in its tone ;  
"I come to see the grizzly old year die !"

III.

O, bitter cold ! beneath dark cottage-eaves  
The icicles drip slowly into length.  
In empty woods black corpses of dead leaves  
Curl up with torture of the winter's strength.

IV.

"Old year, old year, the night flies on apace :  
Impatient waits the new-call'd king without.  
Take up thy mantle, hide thy wrinkled face ;  
What lags the weak, despised old year about ?"

\* \* \* \* \*

V.

Hark, midnight chimes ! The weary eyelids close ;  
Faint sounds his death-knell as the sea in shells :  
The old year dies with all his wounds and woes ;  
The new year comes with heedless ring of bells.

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